

# **The fictionalisation of reality in the pre-war novels of Jean Giono**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the fictionalisation of reality as a creative response to the human condition in novels selected from the prewar writings of Jean Giono where, through an emerging portrait of the artist/poet as healer, the author explores the contention that the power of the creative mind has the strength to master reality.

Across these early works, we will identify the permanence of an inner tension between “reality” and the “dream” within the human mind, as Giono’s characters struggle with the uniqueness of their position in a seemingly alien universe. The dream arises from a desire for unification with the rest of the natural world, while reality must acknowledge that humankind is excluded from such a union on account of its specificity.

The analysis will uncover Giono’s ongoing attempt at achieving a solution to the existential problem facing humankind through a marriage of human creativity with the power of the cosmic forces, expressed through the spoken/written word. Through the subjective imagination of his emerging poet-protagonists, the author celebrates and endeavours to sustain an illusory external world of contrasts which challenge everyday perspectives but which are also striking in their interdependence. The inherent duality of the poetic metaphor, with its two domains of reference, makes it the keystone of a cosmos which is composed of a series of binary oppositions. By its very analogous nature, metaphor reveals an underlying interconnectedness to the vastness of the universe which is a persistent theme in all art – the revelation of universals. For Giono, the strength of the natural life force correlates to a force of poetry that is capable of releasing humans from the servitude of ordinary life by introducing them to a universal world that holds more ontological truth than the restrictions of an immediate, apparent reality.





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## Introduction

*“C’est la puissance poétique, une force comme les quatre éléments. Il y en a cinq : l’eau, la terre, le feu, l’air, la poésie.”*<sup>1</sup>

All of Giono’s dramas are, in essence, dramas relating to a constant tension to be found within the human mind: the existential struggle between the actual state of humankind’s position in the physical world, which for our purposes we will call “reality,” and the longing for a desideratum which we will refer to as the “dream.” In the works of his first manner,<sup>2</sup> Giono attributes the unfulfilled yearnings of the human heart to what he sees as an anomalous and disjunctive relationship between the praxes of human culture and the promptings of natural instinct, which in a wider sense translates to a clash between civilisation and the living world.

Using the early novels in order of composition, and with reference to some pertinent novels from the second manner, this study will examine in detail the emergence and the development of the dream world that is born from the desires, natural impulses and reactions of the human mind, and consider the degree of success that it sustains against reality as an agent that can bring fulfilment to humans. We start from the basis that the dream has need of a creative catalyst for its inception. In the works that the author has grouped together under the title “Pan”, a quality of oral spontaneity to the writing makes us aware that this energy originates from the author himself in his role as poet/story-teller – through the power exerted by his written word on the mind and imagination of the reader and in the rudimentary creativity of the emotional reactions of his characters. In other novels we can trace the emergence and evolution of the poet/healer as the author’s mouthpiece and demiurge.

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<sup>1</sup> Giono, from notes made towards the composition of *Pour saluer Melville*, cited III, p.1099

<sup>2</sup> An explanatory note is necessary on the reference to the pre-WWII novels as works of the first manner. It is customary to classify the work of Giono into two “manners”, or “periods”, thus : the first, from 1929 to 1939 (from the appearance of *Colline* to the declaration of WWII.); the second, from 1947 to 1970 (from the appearance of *Un roi sans divertissement* to that of *L’iris de Suse*, some months before Giono’s death.)

There has been much discussion on the validity of the supposed “two manners”, which are regarded as being bridged by a body of work composed in the period of time that lies between the two, generally known as the “works of transition”. Henri Godard discusses the question of two manners at length, and has this to say: “Ton, style, image donnée de l’homme, place faite au monde naturel, tout apparemment s’y oppose. [...] Encore aujourd’hui, [1995] Giono est l’exemple rare sinon unique d’un écrivain qui a non pas un, mais deux publics, dont chacun s’attache à la moitié d’oeuvre que l’autre ignore ou rejette.” (Godard, *D’un Giono l’autre*, pp. 10,11)

The word “poet” is used in reference to Giono, because although the works that will form the basis for this study are defined as “novels” their author considered himself to be above all a poet, one whose basic joy lies in a passion for creation through words. This perception has been often confirmed by others. “Pour Giono, un roman doit d’abord être un poème » states Michel Gramain<sup>1</sup>. Jacques Chabot believes that “Le poète et le romancier [...] chez Giono, ne font qu’un...”<sup>2</sup> And Sylvie Vignes has said: “Poète beaucoup plus qu’auteur cérébral, ce sont des échos de son moi profond que Giono donne à lire.”<sup>3</sup> It would be possible to quote numerous others critics, writing in a similar vein.

Poetry is seen by Giono as a vital and living force, to the extent that he has described it (see above) as a fifth natural element, because he believes it to be capable of shaping the world that is perceived by the human consciousness in much the same way as the four basic elements give substance to the material world in which humans must physically exist. Although a contemplative form, because it is so closely associated with the human senses poetry can not be deemed to be an abstract in the way that philosophy can. In its original spoken form it is initiated by the same breath-force that gives life to the human body and that activates the sense organs which are used to detect the elemental forces of the surrounding natural world. For Giono, it is the imagination and the senses working in concert that give rise to the spiritual dimension to be found within human beings – which he frequently refers to as *le cœur*. “Spirit” takes its original meaning from the force of breath. Spirit: c.1250, “animating or vital principle in man and animals,” from O.Fr. *esprit*, from L. *spiritus*, “soul, courage, vigor, breath,” related to *spirare*, “to breathe.”<sup>4</sup>

In association with this sensual aspect, poetry retains elements of the ancient rituals by which man celebrates the basic rhythms of life and is therefore linked with things that are held to be sacred. It is capable of banishing the forces of darkness and division by stimulating the human imagination, bringing new life and renewal as it challenges everyday perspectives and realigns them at the same time as it illuminates human universals. The concept of inspiration also takes its meaning from the breath force. Inspiration: c.1303, “immediate influence of God or a god,” especially that under which the holy books were written, from O.Fr. *inspiration*, from L.L. *inspirationem* (nom. *inspirato*), from L. *inspiratus*,

<sup>1</sup> Michel Gramain, Introduction, *Jean Giono I, Critique 1924 -1944. Les carnets bibliographiques*, (pages for the introductory remarks remain un-numbered).

<sup>2</sup> Jaques Chabot, *La vie rêvée de Jean Giono*, p.8

<sup>3</sup> Sylvie Vignes, *Giono et le travail des sensations*, p.10

<sup>4</sup>Online Etymology Dictionary, Douglas Harper, Nov.2001. [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com)

pp. of *inspirare* "inspire, inflame, blow into," from *in*- "in" + *spirare* "to breathe".<sup>1</sup> Through the vehicle of the written word, Giono celebrates, in a pantheistic manner, the restorative power that can be contained within the spoken word which is an audible manifestation of the breath force which symbolises all life.

As an agent of this power, Giono's poet/storyteller has a social responsibility to restore humankind to a state of spiritual balance. The author believes that, in what he sees as increasingly dysfunctional societies, controlled by mechanisation and commerce, humans have become deprived of simple purpose in their lives, alienated from one another and estranged from the living world which is their rightful inheritance. Throughout his earliest novels, he uses a close familiarity with the countryside of southern France and an acquaintance with nature's rhythms and cycles and their effect upon humans and the other components that make up the universe, to produce a vivid representation of the true spirit of the land of his birth. For him, the artist must become one with the world in order to interpret its essence, its mysteries and its history. He must "mix" himself with it. In his essay entitled *Virgile*<sup>2</sup> Giono says of the poet: "il se mêle au rythme du paysage et des légendes qui s'y accordent, [in order to] donner une voix aux arbres [and to] dessiner dans les nuages de l'air natal les grandes figures de la patrie." (III,1023) It is just such an intimate relationship with the landscape that allows Giono to bring about a deliberate deconstruction of reality through the intrusion of discrepancies and idiosyncratic elements into descriptions drawn from the world before him. He adds his own creative energy to a robust vitality absorbed from the natural world to produce a new, demiurgic tool: his *imaginaire*. In the very earliest works, the power that manifests in his writing as the living force of nature is mixed with a corresponding, responsive, emotional force found within his human characters to create "Pan" – an entity with a conscious will, capable of both benevolence and malevolence – that builds and shapes the author's virtual world.

While some readers and critics have chosen to see many of Giono's early works as simple idylls, the major critics (such as Citron, Clayton, Godard, Durand and Neveux, to name only a few) have always recognised that there is already a darker side to the early novels, evident not only in the occurrence of natural catastrophes within these works, but also to be found in the interaction between humans and the natural world and humans within community. There

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Written between Nov. 1943 and Jan. 1944.

is a definite ambivalence in Giono's approach to humanity's relationship to the living world in the earliest works, which a number of critics have directly addressed. In an article he has titled "Le Panique,"<sup>1</sup> Marcel Neveux has looked at the problem of defining the exact nature of this relationship. Neveux concludes that while the philosophical position of the author seems to fluctuate, alternating between the total obedience of humans to natural laws on the one hand and the governance of the natural world by humans on the other, elements of humanity's essential specificity are established from the beginning. And Henri Godard comes to a similar conclusion. While Godard acknowledges "une intuition de l'unité"<sup>2</sup> within the imagination of Giono, which constantly desires to shape the world into one form, he maintains that it is only in the contemporary essays of Giono that these imaginative dreams draw conclusions which at times appear to be socially radical. In the novels, says Godard: "Le fantasme d'une fusion de l'homme dans le grand tout du monde ne cesse jamais, dans ces romans, d'être en lutte avec une interrogation sans fin sur sa place au sein de ce monde, c'est-à-dire sur ses différences avec les autres composantes."<sup>3</sup>

The fictitious realm which belongs to the world of Giono's early novels has been well studied and for the reader and the researcher there is a substantial body of critical literature to draw upon. The very fecundity of the Gionian *imaginaire* has provided a rich vein to mine. For this reason, the recognition of an interiorisation of the external world in the face of its more frightening aspects has been the basis of several discussions and works. Perhaps of particular note are two of the more recent studies we have come across during our research. *Les Métamorphoses de l'artiste : l'esthétique de Jean Giono (2000)* by Jean-François Durand is a very long and impressive work. It examines almost all of Giono's fiction and its place within the corpus of western literature and includes the evolving figure of the artist within a study of the changing styles that occur across the body of the author's work. In her book *Giono et le travail des sensations : un barrage contre le vide (1998)* Sylvie Vignes examines the menace of the void in all its forms as well as the evolution of the theme of sensorial perception throughout Giono's work. Vignes puts the emphasis on the post-war works of the second manner in studying Giono's augmentation of the senses and what she sees as their elevation to man's sole form of defence against the threatening aspect of the void.

<sup>1</sup> Marcel Neveux, "Le Panique", in *Giono Autrement*, p.91

<sup>2</sup> Henri Godard, *D'un Giono l'autre*, p.43

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp.44 - 47

This dissertation will take advantage of the scholarship of others by aiming at a productive assimilation of some of the conclusions of a number of critics into the broader lines of our study. Through careful textual analysis, however, it also aims at providing an original contribution to the understanding of the way that the selected themes find their resolution within individual texts. In examining the effectiveness of the power of the mind to triumph over apparent reality across the novels of the first manner, we will begin by tracing and exploring the inner workings of a circle which makes a full rotation within Giono's earliest novel, *Naissance de l'Odyssée* where the external world of mundane reality has only a tenuous hold on humankind and is easily deconstructed by the imagination of the poet; but where the recreated, compensatory universe remains equally vulnerable and open to destruction by those forces that would deny it an existence. In examining the contest between reality and the dream as it plays out across subsequent novels of the first manner, we can identify a similar cycle of creation and destruction. The cycle has its genesis in what the author seems to see as a split in the natural world, caused by the corruption of an unspoken, universal law of equilibrium. The tension of a nature/civilisation opposition within the universe is reflected on a societal level by an individual/community opposition and on a spiritual level by a battle between the poetic and the prosaic. The hopes and fears projected from within the human mind are suggested by a series of binary oppositions, existing on a thematic level and expressed through concrete imagery. Using the inherent duality of the poetic metaphor, the author attempts to resolve all opposition in the perceived world and bring spiritual healing through the creation of a state of homeostasis within the human mind. Our examination of aspects of Giono's imagery will have the aim of emphasising how, through the deconstruction of standard concepts in the construction of new ones, contradictory forces can become complementary and all oppositions resolved and integrated in a synthesis of life. We will also consider the paradox of how, despite his desire to bring about a state of universal cooperation, the author practises a form of elitism by privileging and separating out those human beings who choose to inhabit a new world of *poiēsis* from those who must/will settle for stark reality and the commonplace.

As Giono makes use of the analogous nature of the poetic word to increasingly commingle the inventive power of the human mind with the energy to be found within the natural world we can track the emergence and development of the poet protagonist as the catalyst of change. The crucial tool which the author/poet must acquire in order to conquer and control his/her virtual universe is the mastery of the word. Through the redemptive power of words one can learn to transform the worlds of others, changing perspectives to

bring unification, clarity of vision and hope: the artist must assume responsibility for assisting others to overcome the human problems of separation and miscommunication which give rise to isolation, and general despair. The mission is presented in a messianic light – while Giono's poets offer illumination to the minds of others, redemption from darkness will be available only to those who choose it; that is to those who have willing hearts, open to the rich influences of the living world. In the overall movement towards a state of enlightenment, the author's universe becomes increasingly one that is perceived through the senses of his creative, visionary characters as they systematically disclose the secrets of an invisible reality. Giono's hope for humanity progressively develops into a form of quasi-religious fervour as with the full incarnation of the poet as healer the author indulges himself in one final attempt to achieve a form of integrality in the human psyche by bringing enlightenment via the restorative power of words. An ultimate confrontation between reality and the dream, confirms the basic ongoing truth of Giono's world system. The essential solitude of humans in the universe, resulting in their isolation, persists; but the subjectivity of the human mind enables the ongoing relief afforded to the human race by the gift of fantasy and illusion.

The texts themselves are selected from the pre-war period and range, in order of composition, from Giono's first work, *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, to that published in 1934, *Que ma joie demeure*. The novel based on the author's experience of the First World War, *Le Grand Troupeau*, falls within this range, but as its subject matter is too specialised for the general scope of our discussion it will not be included among the works examined in detail although I will make reference to it on several occasions. I will also refer to various other novels, *récits* and essays drawn from the corpus of Giono's work, wherever it is profitable to do so. In this manner, I will make particular use of both the short work *Présentation de Pan* because of its close association with the novels written in the *panique* style, and of one of Giono's later novels *Mort d'un personnage*, which provides a useful comparative example of the development of Giono's emerging artist-protagonist.

The approach has been to examine the text in detail – even at times to attempt to get beneath the skin of Giono's heroes – on the premise that it is by penetrating into the very body of the writing that one can better understand the nature of it, and hence the substance of the dream. It is said that those who attempt a convincing imitation of the pictorial technique of the masters, know their works better than those critics who have never held a paintbrush in their hands!



## Chapter One – Naissance de l’Odyssée

*Au moment même où je m’asseyais et prenais la plume, les verrous tombaient, les geôliers mouraient, les portes s’ouvraient, les sentinelles me saluaient, la route se déroulait, la ville reculait derrière moi à mesure que mon bon pas entraînait dans la liberté des vergers d’oliviers, la légende, le temps, la géographie et l’histoire étaient mes servantes.<sup>1</sup>*

**Introduction:** *Naissance de l’Odyssée*, proves to be a foundational work. It serves to introduce almost all of the important themes which will be developed in Giono’s subsequent novels and already contains the essential elements which will make up the author’s romantic world. Remarkably, it outlines and announces the overall movement that we will trace across the body of these early novels, where reality gradually becomes completely effaced by a fictional world whose human characters have deliberately become the product of their own creativity.

The interwoven themes of the novel are united into this overall movement through the subjectivity of the narration. All arise from the thought life of the character of Ulysses as reactions of the man to the world that he must inhabit. We can identify three main interrelated threads which constantly intertwine.

1. The desire for flight from a quotidian world: The book plays with various levels of fiction, but at the core of the work is a reflection on the relationship between reality and fiction, which is really a reflection on the subconscious drive towards invention, on the human hunger for dreams in the face of an indifferent universe and the proliferation of such fantasies through the creative word. It is an exploration of the process of creation itself.

2. In this, his first novel, the author sets up the basic inner tension which will always remain an essential element of the Gionian hero. Binary oppositions, existing on the thematic level and expressed through concrete imagery, begin to suggest the essential human dilemma – a fundamental need for acceptance within society and for protection from the elemental forces must struggle with the aforementioned quest for freedom arising from the desire for individuality and adventure.

3. A marriage of the power of human creativity with the force of the natural elements (most particularly in this novel, the force of water) forms a tool which is used by the author

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<sup>1</sup> Préface à (*Naissance de l’Odyssée*) “*Livre du mois*”, fin 1937 ou début 1938; cited in “Notice”:Appendice III, *Œuvres Romanesques Complètes*, vol. I, p.844

for a threefold purpose: to impart a chimerical dimension to images of the surrounding world that arise from within the poet's imagination; to portray the potent energy generated by the oral expression of this vision to others; and to depict its independent proliferation through the fertility of the creative human mind.

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In recounting *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, Giono portrays his version of the birth, through one very ordinary man, of the extraordinary world of poetry which forms the Homeric legends. At the same time he initiates what will become, over years, a large body of work containing his own personal universe. The first of Giono's completed novels, *Naissance* was written before the books of his PAN trilogy but was not published until after they had appeared. The work had been initially rejected for publication by Grasset (the publishers of PAN) on the grounds that it was "un peu trop le jeu littéraire"<sup>1</sup> and would appeal to only a limited number of readers, but was accepted in 1930 by another editor after the success of the first two books of the trilogy. In the preface to this original published edition, Giono – having travelled a few years further along the road as a writer – passes this comment on his work:

"Il est gauche et maladroit, à la fois dans son style et dans sa construction; c'est la première chose qui est sortie de moi." (I,844)

Yet, although it is a short work, *Naissance* required more than two years of diligent writing and rewriting from its young author. This long apprenticeship is the reason why Pierre Citron comments in his "Notice" which accompanies the novel in the Pléiade: "Giono apprend donc son métier d'écrivain avec rigueur, avec obstination."<sup>2</sup> And Henri Godard passes the observation that this first work is "moins simple et moins léger qu'on ne pourrait le croire".<sup>3</sup>

Before beginning work on *Naissance* Giono had composed a number of poems, in particular a number of Greco-Latin prose poems (some of them published, to favourable reviews), and had produced some short pieces of prose as well as commencing two novels which were to remain uncompleted. These early writings provide evidence of the strong influence on Giono of some of the great writers of the western literary tradition. Having made the decision in 1911, at the age of fifteen, to terminate his formal education and work in a bank to supplement his family's very meagre income, Giono began an earnest process of

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Tisné, letter of January 1928, cited in Citron's "Notice", I, p.834

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Citron, "Notice", I, p.830

<sup>3</sup> Henri Godard, *D'un Giono l'autre*, p.174

self-education, just as his father had before him. He would make a regular purchase of as many important literary texts as his very limited resources would allow.<sup>1</sup> An appreciation for such works had been learned from his beloved father, Jean-Antoine, but there was also a practical reason for the young man to restrict his reading to the classics: several classics in paperback could be purchased for the price of one work of modern fiction. Before long the strength of this passion for reading<sup>2</sup> would be matched, and then surpassed, by a passion for writing, although Giono's earliest efforts at composition were, at best, unremarkable. Of the first of them to be printed in any form (a poem which appeared in a local paper in 1913), Citron dryly remarks: "Un génie a le droit de ne pas avoir été précoce."<sup>3</sup>

By the age of sixteen Giono had already acquired a deep knowledge of the works of Homer. From an early age he would read aloud, together with his father, from these epic poems. In the autobiographical-novel of his childhood, *Jean le Bleu*, Giono creates a composite mentor-character (based partly on an unorthodox priest, a friend of Giono's father) known as *l'homme noir*, who brings books to read to the young Jean. *L'homme noir* has a special skill in reading. He enters so sensually into the text with "une telle intelligence de la forme, de la couleur, du poids des mots", (II,96) that his voice is no longer just a sound for the boy, but is described by him as the medium which gives birth to "une vie mystérieuse créée devant mes yeux." (II,96) Among these books which have the ability to transfigure everyday life is the *Odyssey*. Giono uses the bones of this epic myth on which to build his own tale of the beginnings of fiction. This narrative poem provides much scope for (indeed, would have helped to contour) the Gionian *imaginaire*. It has gods and epic heroes, but it also has servants and villains and room for concern with the everyday things of life. Above all, it imagines a series of fantastic journeys to fringe-worlds which lie somewhere between reality and make-believe. The *Odyssey*, says Oliver Taplin, "knows scarcely any limits in place.[...] It is a poem of the sea as well as of land, it reaches to the verges of the known world, and beyond into the realms of fable".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Authors included: The Greeks, Virgil, Cervantes, Goethe, Balzac, Corneille, Shakespeare and Diderot among others.

<sup>2</sup> In his comprehensive biography of Giono, Pierre Citron tells us that Giono's passion for reading good literature was such that he couldn't bear to see what he perceived to be mediocre books in the hands of friends or loved ones (while making a single exception for his mother). While still in his teenage years Giono burned a younger cousin's collection of romantic novelettes (which put the girl in an embarrassing situation as several had been lent by friends), and from then on would leave reading material for her to call by and pick up from a corner of his mother's boutique. (*Giono: 1895-1970*, p.56)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.58

<sup>4</sup> Oliver Taplin, Chapter Two : "Homer", in *The Oxford History of the Classical World*, p.61

To his biographer, Pierre Citron, Giono himself described the epic poem as a book of “grands vents” and “espaces”.<sup>1</sup> At this period of his life – the time when he began writing in earnest – the young man worked as a bank clerk all day and so felt himself to be in urgent need of the “espace spirituel”(ibid) that Homer’s work evoked for him. Throughout the early novels Giono will frequently make use of a term which expresses the promise of freedom that a limitless, external expanse suggests to the human mind. While the expression – “le large” – is particularly appropriate for *Naissance* with its strong marine imagery, whether this expanse is one of sea, land or air makes little difference to the author who constantly blends these elements or substitutes one for the other as in the early novel, *Colline*, where above the mountain of Lure the vultures turn all day in “l’eau du ciel.” (I,128) or in *Regain*, where one finds oneself “dans le grand large du plateau comme au milieu d’une mer” (I,362). By extension, this concept of an external expanse also encompasses the internality of human reactions in the face of the very vastness of the expanse: the struggle within, between the basic human need for security and self-preservation and the drive towards exploration and adventure. In the early novels the open sea, or its various substitutes such as a wind-swept plateau or a wide stretch of sky, will signal situations which present an exposure to the terrors and mysteries of the unknown, the alien and the inconstant, and/or (at different times, it can be either or both) the promise of freedom to reach for whatever waits beyond, unhindered by fear.

The physical restriction and tedium imposed by Giono’s early workplace existence was, however, counteracted by the opportunity provided by his secluded position to write secretly and frequently throughout the day. In the preface for the *Livre du mois* edition Giono has this to say:

“Mon pays n’a de féerie que pour l’homme libre. Rien de toute la magie du jour ne pouvait me toucher ; pendant qu’elle flottait sur les collines, j’étais enfermé à côté des coffres-forts. Il y avait un fantastique prisonnier en moi-même qui passait son temps à préparer son évasion.”<sup>2</sup>

The young Giono finds a magic formula. He can attain a place of refuge at the same time as he takes flight into a great expanse, by escaping from his safe but tedious everyday existence into a unique new world that he has created. In his first novel, his own experience becomes

<sup>1</sup> Citron, “Notice”: *Naissance de l’Odyssée*, I, pp.814,5

<sup>2</sup> “Notice” :Appendice III (Préface, *Le Livre du mois*), I, pp.844,5

that of the bored Ulysses, trapped by Circe in a “vie douloureuse” (I,9), imaginatively fleeing in a dream ship:

“Il étendait les voiles, il amorçait la cadence du chant de route: une ombre de flûte gémissait ; sous l’ombre de ces gémissements les rameurs courbaient leur dos de fumée [...]. La nave fantomale virait sa poitrine face au large...”.(I,9/10)

The author’s early foray into writing proves, therefore, to be a practical lesson in the overcoming and alchemic power contained within the imagination. The very sterility of the bank environment becomes a positive factor: a blank sheet upon which the writer can project and design his images. Perhaps it is because of this experience that the process of returning to, or arriving at, some point (of zero) which provides the creative mind with a *tabula rasa* will be a constant in all the texts which fall within the scope of this study. Time and again within the context of a work Giono will use a variety of devices to achieve the state of blandness, blankness or vacuity upon, or into which, he can begin to project an image and re-design the world to his liking. The first of these is found in the initial image from the “Prologue” which launches *Naissance de l’Odyssée*, when the shipwrecked Ulysses, as helpless on the sand as a tiny infant, opens his eyes on a new world like one reborn. This moment marks a division between the “reality” of a former life (as the man of action), and the beginning of the “dream” (and the birth of a poet) – the start of a new way of life through which Ulysses will gradually reinvent himself. Barring the necessity of his journey home, he will never again return to the sea but he will carry it within, deep in his spirit, as the source of a new reality. All of Giono’s “heroes” feel the land of their birth like a powerful force within them, as Giono himself does. Ulysses, likewise, feels the pull of the home base, Ithaca, but also the overpowering call of the unknown which is represented through imagery by the expanse of the sea – the pervading desire to search for fulfilment which will colour every aspect of his world view. The author is already experimenting with the passage from the concrete form of the physical world to the reality of an interiorised space which will become perfected in his later novels and is at its most palpable in the overlapping, imbricated images to be found in *Noé*.

Giono/Ulysses’ total enjoyment of the freedom to invent is evident from the beginning lines of his “Prologue”. Plosives are used as a form of onomatopoeia: “Des claquements de petits pieds battirent” (I,3). The use of concrete images to portray abstract concepts, which will become so well developed in the PAN trilogy, is already evident through metaphors and similes which emphasise the unity of the cosmos as different aspects of nature and the

material world are compared with, transformed into, or merged with others. But it is striking that the most vivid imagery is immediately that which evokes the ocean in its various forms. In experimenting, Giono indulges in rich, sensuous imagery: “La mer perfide hululait doucement : ses molles lèvres vertes baisaient sans relâche, à féroces baisers, la dure mâchoire des roches.” (I,3) Adjectives are chosen in the opening sequence for the purpose of portraying the personality of the elements; but beyond being anthropomorphic, they are also conspiratorial. “Sous lui, la chair exsangue de cette terre qui participe encore à la cautèle des eaux ”(I,3) : a collusion between earth and water which hints at the powers behind nature which will unite against the citizens of “les Bastides” in *Colline*. “La mer perfide” (I,3) has claimed Ulysses and is reluctant to give him up. He tries to stand but “ses jambes, des algues! Ses bras, des fumées d’embruns.” (I,3) The sea, like all of the forces of nature in Giono’s work, can be both benevolent and malevolent. It is this dual aspect to nature, which engenders both exaltation and fear in humans, which will be developed and explored throughout the PAN trilogy.

While the legend of Ulysses offers the young author much stimulating raw material with which to work imaginatively, to select this book as a springboard for the creative process which will build a world of new dimensions means to begin with the already fantastically rich imagery of the Homeric universe. Although the mythological form of Ulysses’ adventures will allow free reign to the deliberate *démessure* which is such an essential part of Giono’s creation, to begin his tale of the genesis of fiction Giono must start from a base of simple reality. For this first novel, then, he must initially invert the creative procedure and make the extraordinary, ordinary. The original work of Homer is subjected to a general devaluation, which takes it from the level of a noble epic to that of a “realistic” novel.<sup>1</sup> Ulysses has tarried on his long passage home only because of the women he has met. The drive that compels him to complete the journey is a need to escape *ennui* (the germ which will burgeon much later in the *Chroniques* and the *Angelo* cycle is sown this early), to flee from the limitations and confinement that Circe imposes, spurred on by an ambivalent longing which already encompasses the basic inner tension which characterises the Gionian human: in this case, a desire for the comfort of the known in the form of the home base (security), and the desire to eliminate his rival and re-conquer Penelope (adventure). The writer begins with the concrete simplicity of the things that he knows, selecting the components which make up the physical

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<sup>1</sup> Agnès Landes makes this same point in her essay, “Présence du mythe dans Naissance de l’Odyssée” : “Giono emprunte personnages et motifs homériques, mais détruit le mythe épique pour créer un mythe personnel essentiel, celui de la parole créatrice.” in *Jean Giono 7: La revue des lettres modernes*, 2001, p.20

setting for the novel from the backdrop to his own everyday life, thereby underlining the mechanism of deliberate pretence which is involved in the invention of his fictional world. In what will prove to be a prototype for the usual Gionian setting, the countryside and towns depicted are essentially those of Provence with the addition, in this overtly theatrical piece, of such scenic effects as temples to the gods amongst the bushes. Any anachronisms are either ignored or deliberate, being in themselves theatrically effective. Giono has little knowledge of the exact décor of ancient Greece and little concern for authenticity. The poet is in search of the universal. Ulysses' farm, according to Pierre Citron's "Notice", takes its form from a synthesis of several large farms in the vicinity of Manosque. The characters are also drawn from local life rather than from legend and all are partly comic in the burlesque tradition; the peasants with their superstition, earthy humour, generosity and greed, being based on locals of Giono's acquaintance. The rich, as Citron points out<sup>1</sup>, are often made into figures of fun through the disparity between their profound mediocrity and the prestige that the credulity of others accords to them. However, while this is true, one can also observe a certain measure of psychological complexity. This is unusual for the characters of Giono's early works. Portraits complex enough to overtly display the cunning and duplicity of humans, (in particular those humans who are members of the bourgeoisie) and their capacity for self-deception, will largely go underground in the remaining works of the "first manner" to emerge again in the *Chroniques* and the *Angelo* cycle.

There is another aspect to note, and one which is unique to the characters of *Naissance*. They carry within them an open belief in a multiplicity of divinities of all kinds. In this first novel, Giono depicts the terrifying and exhilarating aspects of the forces which control the natural world, and the natural urges of humans, through the perspective of the Greek imagination (generally that of Ulysses), which deifies Nature. By scattering references and allusions to the Greek gods and spirit-beings throughout the dialogue of his characters, Giono is able to make use of these beings to build an atmosphere of mystery and to create an arena where the relative nature of truth can be exploited. As Agnès Landes<sup>2</sup> has noted, the gods are a projection of human urges, masking psychological realities. They manifest in the minds of characters at moments of intense emotion, Apollo as the bringer of poetic inspiration (in the form of a type of male Muse), Eros of desire.

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<sup>1</sup> Citron, *Giono*, op.cit., p.110

<sup>2</sup> Landes, op.cit., p.35

The main manifestation, however, is the god Pan. For Ulysses it is Pan who provides the malevolent energy behind the powers of nature which terrorise him when he is wandering the hills, in scenes which exacerbate the tension between the basic human thrust toward adventure and humankind's fear in the face of a realisation of its own frailty. Pan is used as an allegory for the mix of the universal forces from without (elemental), and the correlative forces from within (the emotive response), which constantly assail the human mind.

In *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, by far the most prominent of the external, elemental forces through which Giono gives substance to his fantasies, is water. In expressing to Pierre Citron his impression of the *Odyssey* as a book of great spatial and spiritual freedom, Giono described it as a "bleu et vert" book (as opposed to the "feu et le sang" of the *Iliad* which he perceived to be "rouge")<sup>1</sup> A blue/ green mix is traditionally seen as being evocative of water and in this novel is also representative of the subjectivity of the dream world that Ulysses will create in his head and propagate in the minds of others. In *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, water imagery pervades the text from the beginning to the end; but a realistic marine décor which forms a physical backdrop to the action is rarely present in Giono's work when compared with the Homeric poem. The water images in *Naissance* are more often illusory, projected onto the world from the mind of Ulysses to reveal aspects of the subjective inner world of his thought-life. This fact is evinced through their use as imaginative metaphors describing sequences which are purely and obviously fantastical, or which portray moments of intense human emotion. And they will also be used, on occasion, in a sharply contrasting manner: to illustrate a subjective interpretation of the common, concrete events that are found in the midst of everyday peasant life and which are drawn from the exterior physical world which surrounds the character.<sup>2</sup> *L'imaginaire* of Ulysses thus becomes the intermediary in which both the traditional airiness of the inner dream world and the earthiness of the external peasant world enter a watery realm by the author's use of vivid marine images.<sup>3</sup> To give but one example of the first: when he is lost in the darkness of the cold forest at night, Ulysses curls up, escapes into sleep and dreams that he awakens.

"Il s'éveilla dans un monde visqueux où les arbres ne haletaient pas mais balançaient lentement leurs feuilles à la façon des algues au fond de l'eau." (I,40)

<sup>1</sup> Citron, "Notice" : *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, I, pp.814,5

<sup>2</sup> The contrast in the treatment of this specific theme of the presence of water is not only due to the juxtaposition of the everyday and the extraordinary, which will be a constant throughout the novels of Giono, but is also due to the close association of the qualities of the basic elements; another *leitmotif* which is common to Giono's early work.

<sup>3</sup> Air and fire also, are combined in Ulysses' dream of Ithaca at the inn. (I,22)



By contrast, in the earlier experience of the bright light and bustling traffic of a sheltering inn, a loud burst of communal laughter from the gathered peasants, merchants and travellers registers in Ulysses' mind in this way:

“Le rire suinta comme une eau à travers les groupes, gonfla, déborda le cercle, battant les murs, fit le tour, noya le guitariste et, revenant, souleva même les paysannes qui pouffaient, les balançant sur la houle comme brindilles et oranges sur l'eau clapotante des ports.” (I,25)

Because Giono holds the belief that the imagination has a strength equivalent to that of any to be found within nature, throughout the first works he increasingly associates or commingles the inventive power of the human mind with the energy to be found within the natural world. And the strong imagery that arises from this union is not only used to build the dream world of creatively ingenious beings such as Ulysses, but is also used symbolically to describe the ways in which their inspirations and dreams flow into the lives of others. The association of water is made not only with words, but more particularly with the human voice. The concept of the mouth as a fountain and the spoken word as a stream is given a strong emphasis throughout all the early novels.<sup>1</sup> It is through this mix of water and the spoken word, through imagery which portrays liquidity and incessant transformation, that Giono establishes the voice of the first instinctive poets of his works; those who will interpret the mysteries of the living world to those others who have the ears to hear.

Ulysses' shipmate, the elderly Archias, is the first of the seers and sorcerers who will hold a place of importance in many of Giono's novels. This old man, crazed through the “triste privilege” of seeing the gods (I,4), is one of Giono's intercessors, part of a select company of representatives of the poet/author who carry within their mind a world of dreams and act as a channel between humans and the forces which surpass understanding and reason. There is a supernatural element to these characters who are capable of harnessing the potent force of poetry. They have the ability to cause the barriers to fall between what Giono calls in *Noé* “le monde dit reel” (III,621) and what he refers to often as the “au-delà” or introduces by phrases such as : “derrière le...”, “de l'autre côté de...”, “au fond de....” (passim) These formulas point the way to the dimension which seems to lie beyond all the immediately

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<sup>1</sup> Homer, himself, was associated with water in the Greek imagination – “The early Greeks envisaged the world as encircled by the mighty freshwater river of Ocean, and held that all springs and streams derived from him. Ocean became their image for Homer : all poetry and eloquence derived from him as he surrounded and encompassed their thought-world.” (Oliver Taplin, Chapter 2: “Homer”, *Oxford History of the Classical World*, p.50)

perceptible horizons of this world. As will be usual for most of Giono's seers, Archias, through the words from his mouth (as the author does with the words from his pen), can transport others to such worlds. The "folles paroles"(I,9) of Archias, cause Ulysses to feel himself being carried : "à travers l'étrange pays où les dieux sont autre chose que les conventionnelles figures de marbre." (I,9) The particular role of Archias, points out Jean Onimus,<sup>1</sup> is as a mediator – invented by Giono to link Ulysses with the gods and in this way to lift the power of his lie to epic proportions. Thus, through Archias, Giono links madness, poetry and the divine. Ulysses' lie, says Onimus, will capture the imagination of others because it is a "mélange de fantastique et de réalisme dû à la collaboration d'un fou et d'un conteur."<sup>2</sup> It is in reference to Archias that Giono first uses the most frequent version of the formulaic phrases given above: "derrière l'air"; choosing the word *sourdre* and its association with water to describe how he causes "le monde fantastique qui vit derrière l'air brillant"(I,17) to materialise.

In Giono's early novels we are always either at, or near to, the intersection of his exterior and his interior realm which exist concurrently and fit neatly into each other. The first is Giono's interpretation of the natural world, the everyday which surrounds him: formed from fragments of reality it is as subjective and invented as the other. The other is his shadow world, a parallel realm which the reader is always aware of and which comprises many worlds: the nocturnal, the world of dreams and nightmares, the world of the child, the world of shared love, or a world where mysterious beings live behind some atmospheric curtain. Although these are interior worlds, fictional products of the poetic imagination, they are living realms, not inert, and they are projected outside of the minds of the characters that give them life. The sense that they are part of a fictionalised space, creations with their own geography and populations, increases in subsequent novels. Sometimes the presence of a realm beyond an immediate, perceptible "reality" will be merely suggested by Giono. At times the author will move between these interwoven, overlapping realms with ease, so that one will wane as the other waxes. One will become completely substantial at the expense of the other, which will partly dissolve or completely disappear, but the relative status of these realms can suddenly be inverted. In the later experimental work, *Noé*, there are frequent occasions when both will be equally visible, pertinent and tangible at the same time.

<sup>1</sup> Jean Onimus, "Giono et le mensonge créateur", in *Jean Giono, I : La revue des lettres modernes*., 1974, p.29

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.30

Just such a mix of “reality” and the dream occurs in *Naissance* at the beginning of the story proper, when the recently landed Ulysses sets out on the final path towards home. The second paragraph of *Part One* draws the curtain aside to reveal the arena where the opening scene will play out. Ulysses perceives not only the view that lies before his eyes, but also the seascape that he carries in his heart:

“Le rideau flexible des joncs s’ouvrit sur une étroite plaine qui mimait la chair liquide de la mer. Des vagues de froment brisaient contre le flanc rugueux de la montagne où l’écume des oliviers grésillait ; dans ces calanques ombrées et profondes dormait le flot étale des prés. Une bastidette à forme de nef était à l’ancre sur un champ de trèfle.”  
(I,15)

There are two layers here, but it is not a question of the sea being superimposed on the earth. The solid base comprises something which is not physically present: a real world made from longings, which the face of the earth covers. “Ainsi, *sous* le visage de la terre, Ulysse trouvait toujours les traits aimés de la mer.” [Emphasis added] (I,15) Because the sea has a privileged place in the mind of Ulysses, it has as much substance as the physical presence of the land before him and is expressed in terms of concrete imagery. The dream is therefore given the same solidity as reality by the author, and holds an even greater importance than reality in the thought-life of the individual character. In this way Giono explores the relative nature of truth, the subjective response to a situation which arises from the proclivities and desires found within the human mind.

Another such passage of exploration will come later in the novel at Megalopolis, when an excited and expectant crowd gathers to hear a bard sing. Here, as a guitarist strikes up the prelude, the surroundings are immediately effaced by the “magic” of the muse, and within this void a new world springs up momentarily:

“C’était à Mégalopolis, sur le boulevard du Nord, près le portique du trident, mais *nul ne vit sa vie ordinaire dans la proximité d’Apollon* Pour l’instant avec les notes graves de la guitare *et les souvenirs de chacun*, il avait fait naître dans la nuit une lande fleurie de roses à cœur de sel, une côte où la mer brisait.” (I,48) <sup>1</sup>

Ulysses sees this sea as the well-remembered view from the island where he languished enmeshed in Circe’s decadent charms: “où l’eau dormait sous un manteau de roses mortes”(I,48). On the other hand, his land-locked friend sees it as the view from halfway up a mountain when he turns: “pour regarder par-delà les ossements de la terre cette bande de

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<sup>1</sup>Emphasis added.

*ciel palpitant.*” (I,48) The shepherds see it : “N’est-ce pas comme un vaste pré? ”; as do the potters for whom: “ tout le jour, l’oreille s’emplit de bourdonnements quasi marins.” (I,48) But those who are most affected by the song are those who have no actual memories of the sea to draw upon and whose imaginations are free to soar unfettered. (As we will discuss in a later chapter, Giono favours the open attitude of mind which remains close to that of a child.) For these, the experience of subjective interpretation goes beyond the mind, so that those things that they have only heard of through the words of others become a sensation present in their physical bodies, as if they were feeling “sur toute leur peau la succion des gouffres de l’horizon comme s’ils marchaient droit sur la plage où l’eau se cabre, *car Apollon suscite aisément des mondes inconnus.*” (I,48)<sup>1</sup>

Such passages serve to establish the extent of the influence on humans of the forces from the natural world, and the firm grasp that they have on the minds of the characters. In the novels of the PAN trilogy, especially in *Colline* and *Regain*, Giono will cause his peasants to contend with the elements in order to win the right to survive. It will be in these novels that the struggle for unity within the cosmos comes into full focus with the concept that a mutually profitable interrelationship of humans and the natural world must be established before mankind can thrive. This engagement with the elements has its beginning in *Naissance de l’Odyssée*. It is first established by the direct force of those various oceans whose currents, in the beginning, have controlled the destiny and the destinations of the travellers. In the face of the powerful force of a storm the sea must relinquish their physical bodies to the land, but continues to dominate the thought life of the protagonists. After leaving the actual mass of water, the shore, and then the perceived (and mentally projected) seascape which forms the expanse of the plain, Ulysses must follow the path towards home into the confined space of a wood. Here, where the trees send their roots strongly down into the soil, the sea imagery disappears and the solidity of the earth itself becomes very quickly established. In this environment, which has become alien and restrictive to him because of his long absence, Ulysses quickly becomes ill at ease mentally as well as physically, fearful of what he calls: “les petits dieux inférieurs, sylvestres et champêtres” (I,18) that inhabit this new domain. He bitterly detests the inhibiting heaviness of the land after the freedom of the open water:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

“Il fallait s’y traîner pas après pas et, loin des ces flots sur lesquels il volait, oiseau à bréchet de sapin, à grande aile de toile, il se sentait diminué et un peu plus peureux.”  
(I,16)

Slow progress due to steep slopes compounds a feeling of being heavily anchored to the earth. Yet this same earth which drags and holds through its gravitational pull is slippery with dried pine needles and unstable and inconstant under his feet, as again the idea of a certain lack of substance to the “real” element persists, despite an apparent solidity to the surroundings:

“Sa jambe arc-boutée poussait: ses orteils crispés enfonçaient la sandale dans le terreau mouvant, puis encore, encore et il montait péniblement contre le flanc de la terre.”(I,17)

The slow, painful progress of Ulysses is not only a direct, physical engagement with a new elemental force, it is also a struggle on the mental level in the face of the emptiness of his existence. Relief comes in the form of the comforting “mumure marin” of the pine trees, where the exhausted Ulysses can hear, rejoining him, “le trot maigre de ses souvenirs” (I,16). He can, in this way, sustain himself physically through the mental exercise of suspending reality by recalling the imaginative words of Archias. These words which have been sown into his mind in the past, now bloom with “fleurs merveilleuses que son imagination de menteur embelli[t] encore.”(I,17) so that even though his body must grapple with the arduous task of climbing the slopes, his mind can escape, lifted beyond gravity and fear to the realms of the “au-delà”.

Giono’s use of the term “menteur”<sup>1</sup> here is thrown up as a form of challenge, an antidote to the ordinary. What he sometimes calls a “mensonge” he also often calls a “jeu”. This is a reference to the creative, or perhaps better, the poetic “lie”, through which the fertile imagination enriches the ordinary things of life. But in an objective world (or the universe of those who deny a poetic reality) such a challenge to stark reality is often met with opposition from those who consider play to be insignificant and insubstantial. François Durand expresses this contrast between two world views well, when he says: “L’espace qui naît de l’effacement du monde extérieur [...] c’est l’espace intérieur de la représentation, dont la réalité est mensonge aux yeux du réalisme mimétique, car elle est tout entière contenue dans le monde baroque et fuyant de la parole.”<sup>2</sup> The opposition of the world of reality to that of

<sup>1</sup> W.D.Redfern, discusses the notion of Giono as liar, at length, in the introduction to his book, *The Private World of Jean Giono*.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-François Durand, *Les métamorphoses de l’artiste* p.50

the imagination manifests at this point in Giono's novel through the challenge presented to the traveller by the physical terrain, perceived by the Hellenic conditioning of Ulysses' mind as the possessive and very present grasp of the Earth-Mother – "ô marâtre Cybèle, lieuse des pieds" (I,17) – trying to anchor him to in the solidity of a concrete universe and pull him back from his reverie. His mind is no longer free to escape the world while his body is making its presence felt through the pain induced by a state of near-exhaustion, so that "une à une, les images de ses rêveries s'éteign[ent]." (I,17) For Giono, real terror arises from any threat against the freedom of the mind to overcome what one of the characters of *Naissance* sadly calls "le sort commun"(I,8) – the overwhelming force which threatens to swallow all of humanity in the deadly *ennui* of the everyday and the commonplace.

Yet an unfettered imagination can also give rise to fear – adventure always carries its dangers. Conceptions that arise within the human mind can threaten, as well as release. As night comes on and the wind has begun to seep from the shadows with the sound of a "concert de voix graves harmonisé comme un chœur funèbre" (I,18), Ulysses senses a disquieting influence abroad. It is not only because of physical exhaustion that he is relieved to see the white head of an inn poking above the junipers as the author again uses marine imagery to provide the comfort of the familiar for this place which offers refuge to Ulysses: "Comme d'un récif s'envolent les flocons d'écume, le vol des colombes giclait autour de son toit." (I,18)

Marcel Neveux has the constant Gionian tension between adventure and security in mind when he makes this comment on Giono's inns. In them, he says, "se concilient le voyage et l'immobilité. Le voyageur y devient immobile. Elles sont, au milieu de l'espace, des lieux provisoires, où les inquiétudes s'apaisent.[...] Elles synthétisent de façon privilégiée le désir du départ et l'apaisement du gîte. Cette dernière destination exige qu'elles soient de solides 'maisons'".<sup>1</sup> Here, in *Naissance*, Giono builds in detail a place of solidity and encircling shelter. The main building is "mussé" in the shrubbery, and the open door reveals the welcoming "regard rogue de l'âtre." (I,19) In front of this, two long stone walls "embrassent"(I,19) a courtyard of beaten earth, encircling a great central hearth where a huge open fire is lit every evening. To Ulysses it all signals comfort, companionship and the security of the known.

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<sup>1</sup> Marcel Neveux, *Jean Giono ou le bonheur d'écrire*, p.96

It is from within the safety of this matrix that the tale which will grow to have such autonomous power is first conceived. Set apart from the crowds at the inn is a guitarist, his body concealed in the shadows “comme celui d’un dieu, était de l’autre côté de la nuit.” (I,20), while only his hands are revealed in the light. The hands which hold a pen, an instrument, a brush or a tool are the medium (along with the human voice) through which the images and dreams from the world of the mind are conveyed to the listeners and watchers of this world, and in his writing Giono will often throw the hands of the artist/artisan into relief. Later, in the full firelight, the musician (whom we can recognise as Homer, himself) is seen to be without the use of his eyes – the first sketch of a blind character in the work of Giono. In *Chant du monde* and *Mort d’un personnage*, in particular, the author will develop and present such characters as people of heightened sensitivity and perception. Here, the association of the poet/musician with the divinities elevates this creator of fantasies to the realms of mystery while the music that he makes is music from the living world of nature. Within the domain of the musician’s creative imagination, there is the same marriage of art with the natural forces that is always present in the Gionian mind. The music speaks to the woodsmen at the inn, giving substance to their hopes and comfort for their fears, revealing “le visage de leur rêve” (I,21). It is a language which prepares for music to become the voice of the mountains in *Un de Baumugnes*. From the body of the guitar flows “un bruit gluant, moitié ronflement de ruisseau et voix d’arbre.” (I,21) For Ulysses, the image it gives rise to is birthed from the memory of a plunge in the sea, and again immediately awakens the mystery of the “au-delà”:

“Il avait vu dans le fond glauque de grandes algues silencieuses et que le halètement de la mer balançait. Il était là, se demandant si une insensible harmonie émanée des gouffres, plutôt que la houle, ne berçait pas ces herbes.”(I,20)

Ulysses listens to the blind musician’s words build “un monde dans la chair noire de la nuit” (I,29) awakening within him memories of the torrent that poured from the mouth of Archias, and of filling his own head “sous le canon de cette fontaine”(I,9) . As we have discussed, water mirrors the desires and fears lying at the depths of the human mind, and it is through words (or through music which Giono will sometimes substitute for words and which also flows through water imagery) that those ideas are communicated to other characters.<sup>1</sup> In the novel’s first mention of Archias, his vehement utterance is described as spurting forth in

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<sup>1</sup> In turn, it is always through words (although written, there is a significant oral quality to the tales of Giono’s first novels) that they are communicated to the reader/listener.

“une poussière de salive et d’eau de mer.”(I,4) in a clear depiction of the marriage of human and natural factors. However, this is no harmonious blend of powers of equal strength. Because he is mad Archias is possessed by forces that are beyond him and speak through him, forces that submerge and partly destroy him. As Laurent Fourcaut has noted, he does not have “la ressource de l’art”<sup>1</sup> that Ulysses will later learn to harness and cultivate to the full. But for now, Ulysses’ own creative gift is still rudimentary, instinctive and spontaneous. As a vision of Archias leading a procession of gods passes before his eyes “brouillés”(I,30), he is filled with emotion as if “une source fraîche” (I,30) were bursting within, so that there wells up within him the inspiration for a series of marvellous tales which immediately flow unaided from his mouth.

The original Ulysses of Homer was not a hero in the mould of his Achilles, famed for his strength and bravery, but rather a man of many tricks, famous for his resourcefulness and quick mind. To create his first master wordsmith, Giono draws on this aspect of the hero’s character and subverts it until he produces a type of anti-hero. His Ulysses is a man of little stature morally as well as physically. He is lazy, cowardly, a philanderer, and above all an habitual liar. Within the single character of Ulysses is embodied a conflict between the prosaic and the poetic which will persist throughout all the works of Giono. Jean-François Durand has defined this general tension, which will tend to divide the characters of Giono’s novels into one of two camps, as a conflict between “l’univers des ‘philistins’, et le monde de la *poïésis*”<sup>2</sup>. At this early stage Giono does not discriminate, as he will come to do in later works, between those who possess an intuitive and sensitive openness to the voice of poetry or “le chant du monde” ( that is, “nature’s aristocrats”, a group which often includes peasants), and the superstitious and easily led. Throughout the novel both are held in thrall by the heroic tales and both are incarnated in the person of Ulysses. It is through his inventions, his ability to dream and his talent as a storyteller, that the mediocre and fearful Ulysses will find his deliverance from “le sort commun”. (I,8) He will take on the supreme role of creator. And it is part of the game that Giono lends this inventor of worlds some of his own physical characteristics: “le mince nez” (75), “ un regard bleu” (76), “la langue douce” (57). He is also a sensualist. This incarnation of the writer/story teller himself is the first of many appearances to be found in the novels of Giono, especially the novels from *Naissance* to *Noé*. As an extra twist, Giono, the self confessed and impenitent liar, allows

<sup>1</sup> Laurent Fourcaut, “ Naissance de l’Odyssée, Naissance de l’écrivain”, in *Jean Giono 7, La revue des lettres modernes*, 2001, p.98

<sup>2</sup> Durand, op.cit., p.41



Ulysses to deny his habit of instinctive lying until such time as he will be forced to deal with its consequences: “ Je ne suis pas habile aux contes [...]. Mais je dis franchement ce que je sais.” (I,30).

Ulysses is the first “bouche d’or”<sup>1</sup> of Giono’s novels – instinctively aware of how to hold the crowd with words, just as the guitarist held them with his music. He exemplifies the universal artist contemplating the blank page, or the demiurge commencing creation: “Comme du haut d’une colline la plaine, il vit les aventures magiques étalées devant lui.” (I,33) ) Pretending to be no more than a wandering itinerant he stands in front of the crowd, playing upon their fearful superstitions by invoking the gods, encouraging them to believe in the truth of the extraordinary adventures that he has heard straight from the mouth of “Ulysses”.

In the ongoing struggle between reality and the dream, such a challenge to the real world must always meet an inevitable check. After a night largely spent recounting inventive tales of his own extraordinary prowess, Ulysses awakens to feel diminished, fearful and remorseful – he has not only lied, but has sworn on the gods that his lie was truth, and in that manner has “attiré leur œil” (I,37) on himself. The result of this return to the reality of his quotidian situation is that all creative confidence immediately deserts him. As he sets out on the road home again, this state of mind is symbolised by the aridity he encounters when entering a tract of wild, hilly terrain where he loses his way. In the *récit*, “Présentation de Pan”, and the novel, *Colline*, Giono will introduce the reader to the local mountain which has fascinated him from childhood. “Lure: la mère des eaux ”(I,167) is mysterious and terrible in her majesty, but at the same time desirable. Lure generates the extreme emotions in young Giono which help to awaken his power with words. In *Colline*, “les longs ruisseaux souterrains qui viennent du fin fond de la montagne” (I,135) are associated with an endless stream of fanciful words from the crazed protagonist of the story, Janet. By contrast, this vast mountainous area where Ulysses is wandering is a place where, as if to punish the presumptuous inventiveness of the human mind, the word is quenched amongst the stark aridity. The power of nature dominates, as it has done in the past through the sea, but now Ulysses can hear only the harsh voice of the land. No longer a tamed landscape of cultivated rolling slopes, this is not the “mélopée des vallons esclaves” but the “voix cruelle de la terre

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<sup>1</sup> Giono will later give this title to Antonio, another surrogate for the author and the main character of *Le Chant du monde*.

libre”(I,36). It controls his thoughts, mesmerising “comme un sifflotis de serpent.” (I,36) The total impotence of the solitary human being, who has dared to challenge the elemental forces, is underlined by a contrasting impression of potency in the appearance of the landscape. The thick, bushy growth and twisting vines of the wilderness have an animal-like virility which seems both fascinating and frightening.

Here, the wandering Ulysses is literally out of his element: the barrenness and dryness of the land represent completely alien territory. “Autour de lui rien n’annonçait l’eau : roches décharnées, herbes rousses comme poil de renard. Une haleine torride fumait par les fentes de la montagne.” (I,37) As the traveller descends the slope hoping to find a stream in the valley, he stops and is aware of “un silence effroyable”(I,37) enveloping him. In these early novels, low places will be regularly depicted as oppressive, silent and constrictive, with purity only be found in the higher reaches. For relief, Ulysses must turn to climb the slope again and emerge from the bush to breathe deeply of fresh air under a blue sky, just as in *Jean le Bleu*, the young Jean (Giono) must climb the stairs from the dingy lower reaches of his house to make an imaginative escape from an upper window; the only way that living in such a space remains bearable. The view from on high in Giono’s early work offers a vista, and reveals the far horizons of promise. But it can also open up the terrors of the unknown. Now before Ulysses stretches another version of “le large”:

“La terre ondulait maintenant en plis forestiers. Le bois dressait son écume grise dès le bas de la colline : il courait à perte de vue en grondant. Des roches nues, des bosses sans un poil d’herbe le trouaient.”(I,37)

Relief and hope wrestle with fear as in the distance he can glimpse the unknown land that lies behind the curtain of air:

“Au-delà, une brume brillante tremblait sous les flèches du soleil. Ulysse sentit en lui grandir la peur.” (I,37/38)

As Giono continues to develop the theme of dryness with its underlying association of barrenness as a quenching of the poetic word ( a disablement of what he constantly portrays as the most powerful human faculty ) Ulysses becomes more and more uncertain of his path and even more unnerved. “Je me suis égaré dans la colère de Pan silencieux” (I,39). Fear grows and confidence diminishes, so that the last vestige of creativity deserts him. In the stark reality of this landscape, the dream has been extinguished, and once the dream has died escape becomes impossible because even hope has been denied. The rain, which should

encompass this hope within its promise of seasonal comfort for the parched land, holds no such prospects because it has only attacked it in the past by tearing at the flesh of the earth<sup>1</sup>:

“... pierrailles d’où jaillissait à peine le dard des lavandes, le corps de la terre avait été charnué par les griffes de la pluie ; de larges blessures béaient suintant un fil d’ombre chaude, des plaies séchaient sous leur croûte de mousse, l’air gémissait un gémissement sans fin.” (I,38)

The discovery of a ruined temple in the woods finally affords Ulysses with the momentary hope of finding relief in the form of the habitual basin of water. But cruel reality offers only “un trou fétide”. (I,39) Abandoned by humans, the site is now a place of confrontation between stone and vegetation. The power and vitality of the elemental forces, manifesting through the constant transformation of living material, is always a source of fascination for Giono. A tiny watermelon seed can be present just as it is before one’s eyes, but already contained within this small but extremely powerful microcosm is “sa chevelure de racines et sa forêt de feuilles”, Madame-la- Reine will tell young Jean in *Jean le Bleu*. (II,153) This is another face of the conflict between human creativity and the cosmos, one which Giono will return to again and again. Humans must struggle to establish their domain, but the powers of the natural world always wait to assault their work. Giono depicts the perfectly formed but lifeless stone proportions of each statue of the temple as a “harmonieuse horreur”, when compared with the “vie libre” of the undergrowth. (I,39) Perfection wrought by the hands of man submits with docility to the extraordinary power of the vegetation in what seems to be accepted as the natural order of things. “Les dieux et les herbes viv[ent] leur lente vie éternelle.” (I,39) and the divinities are submerged to the point where the sap appears even to invade the stone. Says Agnès Landes of this scene, “ Dans l’épisode du temple abandonné, Giono évoque [...] la mort des dieux antiques, remplacés par les puissances divines de la Nature.”<sup>2</sup> In *Jean le Bleu*, the aggressive strength of this power will have the ability to vanquish even the Christian god as the creation becomes more powerful than the creator.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This concept of the earth and its vegetation having the capacity to suffer wounds will be present throughout all the early novels, and is central to *Colline*, where it will be humans who show a measure of hostility to the natural world. Giono has introduced this idea somewhat bluntly, already. On the previous night, at the inn, Ulysses has reminded the woodsmen of how “les arbres pleurent vraiment quand on les coupe,[...] et la fibre gluante des troncs écorcés tressaille comme une chair qui souffre” (I,31) -- ideas which will be strongly upheld in the PAN trilogy.

<sup>2</sup> Agnès Landes, op.cit., p.43

<sup>3</sup> This interpretation, of course, leaves aside any consideration of the significance of lifeless, material representations of spiritual power.

“Une bouture de lierre, dit-il, là, dans ce pilier, et tu peux faire la plus grosse image du Seigneur, tu peux la faire en marbre ou en granit et tu verras que le lierre lui mangera son sourire et lui soulèvera les pierres du crâne, et tu verras que la cervelle de Seigneur ça sera ce lierre entortillé dedans sa tête comme un serpent vert. Laisse le temps et ce ne sera plus ici qu’une forêt de lierre avec juste un peu de poussière sur les feuilles.” (II,153)

Ulysses’ creation, the lie, will also take on an autonomous power of its own to become more powerful than its creator and eventually more authentic than reality. This process begins with the effect of his words on the bard. They impact the blind musician in a powerful and intoxicating manner. Just as the fantasies of Archias left Ulysses “ensemencé de fleurs merveilleuses” (I,17) so the creative lie of Ulysses awakens the imagination of the bard, sowing the kernel around which a whole corpus will grow, and providing release from the bondage of his darkness:

“Le guitariste portait en lui une ivresse d’or, le grand genêt resplendissant et tout fleuri qui illuminait sa nuit : la voix d’Ulysse. [...] Des frissons émerveillés le parcouraient au souvenir de ces images que la voix d’Ulysse avait peintes sur le mur noir de ses ténèbres.

[...] Les paroles d’Ulysse faisaient lever en lui une nuée d’images neuves”. (I,35,36)

As Henri Godard has noted,<sup>1</sup> it is not so much the adventures that Ulysses has invented that inspire the bard, as the images that Ulysses paints with words and the quality of rhythm and tone that mark him as a poet. The blind musician’s imagination is fired by the nature of the text, and this state of elation inspires him to call upon his own creative powers. “Ça, ne pourrais-je pas mesurer ces paroles et les chanter?” (I,36) he asks himself. Like Ulysses, his is another character to reveal aspects of the evolving artist as healer which Giono develops throughout the early novels. The bard’s song-poem fires the imagination of crowds wherever it is played because it feeds those human hearts with a desire for mystery and a need for dreams, and to this epic any minor poet from any town feels free to add their “petit morceau à la mode” (I,51). Through the collective power of the human imagination and a chorus of human voices, the tale thus becomes woven into the social fabric as it proliferates throughout the land.

But while Giono promotes poetic invention as a force which offers solace and imaginative escape for the masses, the counterbalance to such an assuagement is still superstitious fear; the contagion of terror and impotence that can be generated by the

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Godard, *op.cit.*, p.175

primeval imagination as it moves into areas beyond the conscious mind. The effect on Ulysses of the escalation of his “lie” has been to cause him extreme distress. No longer is it a matter of the single fabrication, which Giono describes in a concise, concrete image as standing out in Ulysses’ memory as: “l’arbre isolé sur la plaine rase, loin en arrière.” (I,50) It now takes on the aspect of one of those wild areas, found so frequently in Giono’s landscapes, that having once been under cultivation and then abandoned has reverted quickly to a natural state beyond human control. The lie (the invention, or created thing) has developed its own potency. The image of the single tree has become a picture of complexity: dense, convoluted, ever growing and tinged with the supernatural: “un bosquet de lauriers musiciens, un bois sacré, une immense forêt, épaisse, noire, vivante, enchevêtrée de lianes et du tortillement des longues herbes.” (I,50) Ulysses is haunted by nightmares of the pursuing vengeance of the gods who jealously guard their creative powers and are always ready to punish *hubris*. These dreams manifest in Giono’s writing as the god Pan, as the unfettered power of the imagination is again identified clearly and specifically with the forces of the elemental, natural world:

“Le museau fouinard de Pan dépassait les feuillages. Il humait, puis, d’un élan, le chèvre-pied sautait l’orée. Ses longs bras étaient des fleuves enlaçants, son corps, de roche et de terre pétri, bosselé de montagnes, fumait et chantait dans le vent. Il parlait comme une forêt.” (I,52)

There is a further thread to the convolution of reality and fiction which inhabits the mind of Ulysses. While his fears are basic and instinctive, they are at the same time overlain by a realistic, modern social concern. At Ithaca, he dreads the scorn of those who have heard the legends of his prowess when they see before them the physical reality. Insecurity leads him to see himself as a “victime d’Archias et de l’aède” (I,81), trapped into becoming the inventor of a complete myth, a “mensonge ridicule” (I,81). Ulysses fears that, paradoxically, among the clever realists of this “île de menteurs habiles” (I,81) who manipulate truth to enhance their public image, he alone will be marked out as a liar because he lacks their skill. He fears that he is going to be persecuted by “les plus féroces chasseurs de mensonges, les menteurs eux-mêmes.” (I,82). Beneath the humour of this recognition by the author, as creator, of the nature of the artistic ego, there is also an indication of a certain moral standard. It gives substance to Pierre Citron’s impression of Giono’s general attitude to fabricators, discussed in an essay from which this quote is drawn: “pour lui, il y avait deux

sortes de menteurs: ceux qui mentent par intérêt personnel, pour dissimuler ; et ceux qui, comme lui, étaient des créateurs d'imaginaire. ”<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the most important realisation of Ulysses' thought-life will be his gradual understanding that a collective need for fantasy will always blind the people's eyes to reality. It is when circumstances, or what he believes to be the favour of the capricious gods, assist him to prosper through a series of farcical events that are stranger than fiction, that his mind-set moves and he begins to alter his self-perception. The bitterness of his lie thus becomes pleasurable as he listens to others relate the legends of the realm that it has birthed. The elaboration of others then feeds back into his own mind in a sort of creative symbiosis, so that an awareness of the precise concrete forms of this universe grows into a world which has moved beyond the fictive to hold, for him, all the attributes of fact. That Ulysses has come to believe in his own myth is made evident through this passage where his virtual world becomes a reality to all his senses - he can see this other-world, hear it, smell it, and almost feel its air on his skin:

“Il voyait dans son mensonge des formes précises, des gestes harmonieux, la couleur de la lumière d'après-midi, les hautes vagues gémissantes et ces îles aiguës qui enfoncent dans la mer paisible le fer triangulaire de leurs reflets. Il entendait le fracas des eaux échevelées entre les vagues, le grondements des pins et le crissement des cigales pareil au bruit d'une épée qu'on aiguise : il sentait l'odeur des résines, des bruyères et le parfum de ce grand vent des plateaux qui dort la nuit, vautre dans les hautes herbes aromatiques ”(I, 90)

Once he is able to perceive himself in a positive light, as a legitimate wordsmith rather than an inept liar, Ulysses is able to make a conscious career choice: he resolves to use his talent “sciemment” (I,109), to cultivate its strength and power rather than to misuse it by wounding himself with groundless fears. In thus reinventing himself he has produced the prototypical “portrait of the artist”. At the local inn, late that same evening, when he bids goodnight to a group of sailors he leaves them “éberlués” and “ivres d'images, dans un étrange pays ”(I,109). Ulysses fulfils what Giono seems to promote as the mission of the poet, in enchanting the land and releasing others from dull reality and common drudgery. His tales are repeated in the villages, children enact them as games, and in the olive groves the

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Citron, “ Notes sur les « mensonges » de Jean Giono ”, *Bulletin No.5*, 1975, p.38

owners hire bards to sing the song at harvest time, to keep the workers so delighted that their hands work at double speed.

“Ainsi Ulysse fut comme un amandier fleuri au milieu des labours, et il couvrait la terre noire de pétales légers et odorants.” (I,110)

Agnes Landes points up in her essay that whereas Homer used the goddess Athena to effect a transformation in the hero's appearance according to her whims, Giono's Ulysses has remained constantly physically unprepossessing.<sup>1</sup> This is an important point. It is only through the subjective regard of others, when perceived through imaginations that have been “enchanted” (that is, fuelled by feelings of the awe, desire or fear aroused by the poetic tales of his heroic deeds), that Ulysses appears to undergo a physical change. Jean Onimus makes the same point: “On ne voyait plus le véritable Ulysse, maigre, efflanqué, les vêtements en lambeaux: le rêve, la légende aveuglaient les regards.”<sup>2</sup>

With Ulysses, then, having become the very substance of a legend that he has himself created, Giono sets up a direct confrontation between reality and the dream, in the contrasting attitudes of Ulysses and his son, Telemachus. The younger, stronger, man of action has lived adventures that are even more exciting than the fictitious exploits of his father (Giono makes them fantastic to the point of being ridiculous, as a further twist on the relationship between truth and fiction), but as he lacks imagination and the skill of the natural storyteller to enchant, he recounts them to others in a “très désagréable” (I,113) manner. In the minds of his listeners his true stories become but pale and tiresome imitations of the real thing, while Telemachus' sharp and angry insistence upon the veracity of his own words only compounds the problem. Jean Onimus notes that the frustration of Telemachus arises largely from the fact that he is a realist. He can see through the games of his duplicitous mother as well as seeing Ulysses for the coward that he is, and “le paisable triomphe de ce faux masque le rend fou”.<sup>3</sup> In the presence of the lie, suggests Onimus, indifference is not possible. One must choose, and the revolt of Telemachus is an open revolt against the powers of fiction.

Such fierce opposition to the power of the imagination provides the one remaining source of considerable unease for the reincarnated Ulysses. He is now a totally fictional creature and therefore faces a threat to his very existence. In the final pages of the novel, to assuage his

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<sup>1</sup> Landes, op.cit., p.36

<sup>2</sup> Onimus, op.cit., p.36

<sup>3</sup> Onimus, op.cit., p.44

fears, Giono sends Ulysses to the one place where he will find peace and consolation – a safely contained, smooth body of water. On his way down to the pond, Ulysses pauses to stand proudly in the middle of his fields, his pride growing as he reflects on all that he owns: “Il comprenait la beauté de son mensonge, né de sa cervelle, tout armé, pareil à Pallas née de Zeus.” (I,117) Enchanted by his own god-like cleverness, he plays a game with his shadow steering it through the shaded and sunlit patches on the ground as if he were navigating a ship. Now the scene which began Ulysses’ journey home on land, where under the face of the earth the base of the sea could be seen, is inverted. Ulysses’ imagination having “effacé le visage de la terre”(I,118), water has overridden the undulating fields and drowned them with “la voluptueuse mer”(ibid.).

“La houle le balançait, il entendait le choc des vagues, le chant gémissant de la rame, le hoquet du gouvernail. Il était nef, équipage, Ulysse !

Il vivait son mensonge. “(I,118)

With the landscape, as with the man who inhabits it, invention has taken on such a solid form that it has completely effaced reality.

Giono describes the ornamental pond where Ulysses goes as the hero’s “meilleur ami” (I,119), a stretch of water which “n’avait jamais noyé personne.” (ibid.) The most favoured place in the universe of Ulysses is significantly benign, offering protection and solitude.<sup>1</sup> Here, undisturbed and without fear or rivalry, he can indulge his inventive skills through his favourite game: launching little stick boats with sails of bark on this miniature sea. The breeze will carry them around the basin on a voyage full of dangers, which represents “une miniature de ce périple déjà célèbre que la langue d’Ulysse avait fait décrire à sa nef fantôme.”(I,119) The pond, like many of Giono’s images, forms a point of intersection between several dimensions. It is born from the universe of Giono’s childhood and the memory of sailing toy boats in one of the many ponds and fountains of Manosque. It belongs in the countryside of Giono’s Ithaca, at the bottom of the fields of Ulysses, where an enraged Telemachus is watching from behind the cypresses. And it contains and shrinks all the conscious world of Ulysses, until it is able to completely fill his mind, from where it expands again, so that he finds himself aboard the little vessel on its perilous circuit:

“C’était une passe très dangereuse. Chaque fois qu’il voyait la nef s’en approcher, Ulysse frémissait d’appréhension. La scène grandissait jusqu’à emplir de son horreur tout le

<sup>1</sup> The artist’s retreat can be seen as representing a version of the much loved workspace of Giono’s father and is a forerunner of the author’s bureau, the cosy and secluded birth place for many new worlds, which he is soon to establish in the house at Manosque.



cadre de l'horizon. Il se sentait embarqué sur le fragile bois de la cannette, il entendait siffler au-dessus de lui la tête énorme de la scabieuse.”(I,119)

Finally, this hermetically sealed microcosm involves the dimension of the novel.<sup>1</sup> Like a blank page, the “peau mordorée” (I,119) of the water will register images of the world around:

“Pendant la moitié du jour, largement peinte de soleil, elle reflétait le feuillage de cyprès, puis elle était pénétrée de leur ombre de plus en plus noire, à mesure que s’avançait la nuit.” (I,119)

And it records the adventures of the tiny boat as it rushes forward “dans la mer vierge où [as if from a pen] sa trace audacieuse s’inscr[it].” (I,120) Giono makes the fate of this little piece of stick as compelling for the reader as he makes it for Ulysses. We ourselves abandon reality, absorbed in a practical demonstration of the power of the imagination and the magic of words.

When the fragment of bark and stick finally attains the shore, Ulysses/Giono gathers the fragile toy which, now that its goal has been achieved, seems “augmentée de toute la largeur de cet orbe tremblant qu’elle avait tracé autour du bassin.”(I,122) Intoxicated with feelings of victory and the happiness that comes from having discovered one’s purpose, the poet-demiurge believes himself also to be augmented to god-like proportions.

“Ulysse, silencieux et sans geste, érigé dans les herbes, la gardait au creux de sa paume comme un de ces dieux de pierre debout sur le fronton des temples, et qui portent dans la nacelle de leurs mains jointes le symbole matériel de leur puissance.

Il sentait gonfler en lui la floraison de récits nouveaux.” (I,122)

But the gods will always punish *hubris*. Reality waits to reassert itself in the form of Telemachus, behind the cypress trees, singing “une chanson sauvage” between teeth prepared to bite. “Résolu et grave”, he is carefully sharpening with a bill-hook “un épieu en bois de platane.” (I,123) The tension between humans and an indifferent universe is never resolved in reality, only in the dream. As we will see in the works collected under the title of PAN, the position of humans is always a precarious one.

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<sup>1</sup> Both Jean Animus p.42 and Laurent Fourcaut p.119, posit the idea of the basin as the novel in their essays on *Naissance*, already cited.

**Conclusion:** The almost constant presence of the liquid element in the images to be found within *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, underlines an overall subjectivity which persists throughout the novel. The technique of direct narration which the author employs in recounting the tale has a double effect. It enforces our awareness of the author as the story-teller, yet it is most often the perspective of the author's *alter ego*, Ulysses, that we are made aware of, as constant aquatic images and vocabulary compound the chimerical and unusual quality of the world he creates around himself - a virtual world born from the passions he carries in his heart. In *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, water, while essential for physical life, symbolises liberation of the thought life. The liquidity of the element involves incessant transformation as its surface mirrors the hopes, dreams and fears which are locked within the unfathomable realm of the human mind.

These hopes and fears from within are also reflected, on a thematic level, in the series of binary oppositions which Giono begins to put in place in his first novel, and which will be extended and developed over subsequent works. To depict the imaginative dream versus the stark reality of the human situation he starts to introduce a series of dimensions into the physical world in which his characters must exist, involving near and far, high and low, closed and open spaces sculpted through imagery of mountains and valleys, sea and land, woods and plains. Areas of aridity, sterility or barrenness are juxtaposed with areas of innundation or unrestrained growth, to denote humankind's awareness of its impotence in the face of the elemental atmospheric powers (perceived by the Hellenic imagination as divinities) but also to depict the full satisfaction and richness to be derived from the employment of the creative force, as well as the depths of the terrors that it can engender. The crucial tool which the author/poet must acquire in order to conquer and control his/her virtual universe is the mastery of the word. Through the skilful use of words one can learn to transform the worlds of others (potentially for better or for worse). *Naissance de l'Odyssée* (albeit in a droll manner) champions the need to sustain the dream in the face of opposition from the banality and dangers of everyday reality and from those other humans whom Giono sees as denying its restorative power.

## Chapter Two – PAN : le grand tout

*Il faudra que je parle de cette force qui ne choisit pas, mais qui pèse d'un poids égal sur l'amandier qui veut fleurir, sur la chienne qui court sa course, et sur l'homme. « Présentation de Pan » (1,777)*

**Introduction:** The essential role of Giono's more perceptive characters in the early novels is to become the poets, healers and seers of his universe: to transform the world for those around them through the magic of their creative images which are conveyed to the listener through the power of the skilfully spoken word. The author himself was generally considered by those who spent some time in his company to be a great teller of spoken tales. Even in an everyday conversation, writes one acquaintance, Giono « glissait de l'ordinaire à l'exceptionnel, du banal au merveilleux sans paraître y prendre garde. »<sup>1</sup> Pierre Citron tells of having heard him recount, for an hour at least, a sort of improvised novel, “une intrigue de roman extraordinaire, [...] qui restera uniquement un roman parlé, puisque Giono n'a jamais écrit cette histoire”.<sup>2</sup> In the PAN trilogy Giono presents three “simple” written *contes* which could have been composed for the purpose of being recounted aloud around an evening fire in the local tradition of oral story-telling. In each of these works, the spontaneous, oral quality of the narrative is suggested through the energy of the language, the local colour of its syntax and vocabulary, the simplicity of the phrases (which are often paratactic in style) and the concrete vision of their peasant narrators.

The appellation “Pan” signifies the presence of those mysterious forces (introduced in Giono's first novel) which control nature and so, in turn, control the lives of humans. By extension Pan is a metaphor for the creative force and the evocation through poetry of the strong emotions of fear and exaltation which the impact of the natural world gives birth to in the human mind. In broad terms, *Naissance de l'Odyssée* explored the creative impulse of humankind and the process of poetic invention. Initially born from a basic need to extinguish primal fears by making some sense of the natural world, such invention gives rise to culture, or the set of ideas, values and beliefs that form the shared bases of social structure and human action. From Giono's perspective, as a member of a twentieth century society which he sees as having become artificial, sterile and pretentious, the direction of this creative urge can be inverted to become a tool to transcend the restrictions imposed by social expectations and the basic physical and psychological demands of everyday existence, in order to seek out and

<sup>1</sup> Jacques de Bourbon Busset, “Giono et la liquidité”, *Bulletin No. 17*, 1982, p.21

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Citron, “Notes sur les « mensonges » de Jean Giono”, in *Bulletin No.5*, 1975, p.35

return to an exploration of the mysteries which lie beyond them. In the PAN trilogy Giono further builds and develops the unique worlds which, through his writing, he has begun to create from words. The emphasis in these works, however, shifts from an indulgence of the instinctive desire for imaginative escape to a more direct confrontation of the same existential questions that the ancient myths attempt to address.

Giono elects to dismiss the possible existence of a transcendent deity. He attempts to resolve the existential dilemma for humans who aspire to satisfying lives in a world of instability, beauty and terror, by addressing the fundamental questions of origin, purpose and destiny through the creation of a pantheistic universe. His fantasy of "le grand Tout", fuses the animal, vegetable and mineral realms in an attempt to heal the disjunctive relationship between human culture and natural instinct, and between civilisation and the world of nature, and to dissolve all apparent universal contradictions and oppositions in a cosmic *mélange*. Humans, then, in these early novels, are placed on the same level as the other components that make up the world, being neither more nor less important than them. They become part of the landscape and thus integrated into, or at least closely and immediately associated with, the very thing that they are observing or experiencing.

Georges Poulet<sup>1</sup> notes that Giono's earliest characters are so completely involved in the intensity of the cosmic drama they are caught up in, that they have no time for introspective reflection on what has gone before or for anticipation of what is to come, but are occupied minute by minute with an unfolding external reality. In this way images take the place of ideas. Giono is interested, and will remain so throughout the body of his work, in the rapport/reaction between the observer/participant and the thing seen or experienced; in the merging of the character with the new experience to produce a further unique experience. "Je me suis efforcé de décrire le monde, non pas comme il est mais comme il est quand je m'y ajoute, ce qui, évidemment, ne le simplifie pas",<sup>2</sup> he will write in "Voyage en Italie". His external world is timeless, yet ever-changing, because the present moment changes. But it is, as well, always completely subjective, which makes it also an internal world. The focus will centre on whatever impresses the senses at any given instant because what matters is to totally experience the moment of existence. While it is true that the external universe seems to unroll before the eyes and absorb the attention of the one contemplating it in the way that

<sup>1</sup> Georges Poulet, "Giono ou l'espace ouvert", in *Revue des sciences humaines*, no.169, janvier-mars 1978, p.10

<sup>2</sup> "Voyage en Italie", *Journal, Poèmes, Essais*, p.567

Poulet calls an “*extraversion de la pensée cognitive*”<sup>1</sup>, in these early works there is also an equal and accompanying emotional process of internalisation of the viewed landscape.

In each of the works of the trilogy the characters instantly interiorise and transform their experiences in this way as the everyday aspects of their surroundings become extinguished through the catalyst of some powerful, external, creative (or destructive) force which exerts its influence upon the senses and, in turn, on the emotions. In *Colline*, as (the fabricator) Janet’s word insinuates itself into the inhabitants of the Bastides, reality loses its specificity. In *Un de Baumugnes* a controlling despair initially pervades the world of the Douloire, until (the poet) Albin’s music changes this world for those who allow it to penetrate to them, not only by reaching the ears, but also by reaching into that area of human consciousness which Giono will come to refer to later in *Le Chant du monde* and *Que ma joie demeure* as “le cœur”. In *Regain* (in a similar way to the way Giono uses blindness in later works) the initial mutism of the main characters, along with their isolation, allows an awareness and open receptiveness to the regenerative “panique” (or poetic) song of the world which will eventually transform their lives. In sum, the world is perceived as a new reality because the perspective of the regard is ultimately that of the poet, where the storyteller, who is always at one with the watcher, receives and recomposes the world – as is the poet’s task.

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<sup>1</sup> Poulet, op.cit. p.11

## THE NOVELS: AN OVERVIEW

*Colline*, as the first book of the trilogy, immediately and forcefully presents the reader with a microcosmic view of a unified cosmos through the teeming life-force to be found in a small corner of Haute Provence. However, the abundant beauty of the territory of the hillside is soon matched by a sense of primal terror. There is a building presence of menace throughout most of the book, which is fed on two levels. The reader is made aware of the power that the spinner of tales is exercising by the manipulation of words (at the same time, this too operates on a double level: through the ravings of the cunning Janet and through the story-telling of Giono), and is also conscious of the power of the elements which seem to be uniting their forces against a small, vulnerable community of humans.

Confronted with the power and indifference of the life force and the terrors that it can generate, humans are forced to question their rightful place on earth. In order to survive, they must learn how to tame nature. A huge bush fire becomes an explicit battle for basic supremacy. The fire takes on the form of an animal as the men of the village are forced to grapple with it on a fundamental and intimate level, body to body. This battle is prefigured by Jaume's confrontation with a wild boar which encroaches on the village square. The battle is also with the earth and with water : Jaume becomes aware of "la méchanceté des collines" (I,173) and the spring spurns the efforts of the men of the village to encourage it to flow again. *Colline* ends on an ambiguous note. Jaume the natural leader, the thinker and the man of action, seems to have led the humans to triumph. The fire is extinguished, the water flows, Janet is dead and normality has returned to Les Bastides. The men have caught and slaughtered the boar, the meat has been shared among the families and the skin is stretched between two willow wands and hung to dry on the oak tree. But the skin sounds a warning in the night:

"De la peau qui tourne au vent de nuit et bourdonne comme un tambour, des larmes de sang noir pleurent dans l'herbe." (I,218)

The various elements and components of nature possess personalities and wills; they become compliant only when humans respect and appreciate them. Governance is conceded to humans; but only when they have earned that right, and their position remains constantly precarious.

In *Un de Baumugnes*, nature shows its gentler aspects as Giono now confronts the selfishness and negativity of human nature. He invents a country high in the mountains,

where a small community has learned to live in harmony with the environment and where the purity of all things can heal the heart. Trouble for those who farm the unproductive land below the mountains is not caused through the forces of nature. It comes through the evil of one man (who seduces and shames the daughter of the farm, Angèle) but it is made explicitly clear that this man's character has been formed by the environment of the town with "le cœur pourri" (I,226), which is cut off from nature. Through the masterly playing of his harmonica (symbolic of the pipes of Pan), Albin, the hero of the title, marshals the forces of nature in the form of air. By the power of his breath, he produces pure poetic images of the "belles choses de la terre" (I,274), painted not with words but with music (although Giono must paint them with words). Carried on the wind to the ears and minds of listeners, they are so powerful that, once there, they take on their own reality. The curse is eventually broken, the humans are healed and can, in turn, work and heal their barren land.

The idea of humans needing to overcome the hostility of their environment, culminates in *Regain* where it is demonstrated through the stream and especially through the land. Both have reverted to a wild state but become subdued as Panturle and Arsule establish their domain in the right way and are rewarded by the earth producing an abundant harvest. But first Panturle himself must move from an instinctive animal-like existence and, in partnership with Arsule, work through the stages of bringing order to his own life before he can be worthy of the responsibility of caretaker of the earth. Humans must deal intelligently as well as instinctively with the forces of nature, and here Giono is already openly acknowledging that humans must move aside from nature, to some degree, in order to accommodate their own specificity.

### **Narrative style**

In this overview of the novels, it is worth very briefly examining the narrative styles employed by the author which have an essential role in establishing their spontaneous oral quality. For this somewhat technical exercise, we will often draw upon the skills and conclusions of Jean Molino as an expert in this field.

For the first of these works, Giono generally uses the technique of third-person narrative, where the omniscient eye of the author places him in the role of story-teller. This style, when combined with the use of the present tense throughout the entire novel, is particularly suited to *Colline* which is presented as a succession of short tableaux evoking the day to day life of the Bastides, a technique which increases the hallucinatory atmosphere of the novel. The

author remains omniscient but the point of view stays close to the perspective of a peasant and the story unfolds in short, simply constructed sentences. Within this narrative style, much of the story is recounted in the direct speech of the characters themselves (for example, Gondran's recital of Janet's illness) so that we receive the facts as interpreted by these personalities.

In *Un de Baumugnes* Giono replaces *il* with *je*, and *moi*. Beyond being narrated in the first person, the tale has the distinction of also being a written representation of an oral recital. Says Jean Molino: “*Un de Baumugnes* n'est pas seulement un récit à la première personne, c'est aussi un récit oral ou plus exactement la représentation écrite d'un récit oral.” Molino defines his terms: “la distinction entre récit oral et récit écrit, [...] est un des aspects de cette grande coupure qui oppose littératures orales et littératures écrites. Un récit oral impose un narrateur sous la forme d'une personne vivante. En revanche, dans le récit écrit, la présence du narrateur est fantomatique, ce qui ouvre toutes les possibilités de jeux, de renvois, d'allusions et de tromperies: le narrateur dans le récit écrit n'est jamais qu'un mirage, ou, si l'on veut, une illusion inévitable.”<sup>1</sup> In *Un de Baumugnes* Amédée personally, “nous raconte oralement ce qui lui est arrivé [...] les appels au lecteur se présentent sous la forme d'un appel à un auditeur virtuel.”<sup>2</sup> In his “Notice”, Robert Ricatte notes that the recital of this work is generally in the past tense, and quotes Giono himself as analysing this “besoin du passé” (I,971) as being necessary for this tale, in order to convey its tender aspects. The past is used in deliberate contrast to the “système violent, brutal et d'un grand soleil” (I,971) which demanded the use of the present tense in *Colline*.

Yet there are times when, as Molino notes, Amédée slips into the present tense where *était* becomes *est*, as in this passage:

“Ah! oui, ça, je peux le dire, je la vois encore, maintenant, telle qu'elle était. Elle est là, toute seule, au coin de la table, comme une fleur.” (I,259)

This is the present, says Molino, “du souvenir évoqué et cristallisé, incarné devant Amédée sous la forme d'un objet qui se solidifie peu à peu à ses yeux. Mais il est aussi le présent de la création littéraire et de l'hallucination qui s'empare de Giono-Amédée”.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jean Molino, “Celui qui va parler: la parole et le récit dans « Un de Baumugnes »”, in *Jean Giono, imaginaire et écriture*, p.21

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.22

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.23



In *Regain*, the tone of a spoken narrative is established from the very beginning. The narrator begins by relating a tale, in peasant speech, of places people and events with which s/he seems to have some familiarity. And this peasant narrator seems to change identity. At one time s/he has the restricted point of view of one of the stage-coach passengers, sometimes the all-seeing, all-knowing eye of the author; on rare occasions we enter into the inner monologue of the characters themselves.

Molino gives us an interesting discussion on the use of *on* in the narration of *Regain*. “Le «on» de *Colline* est un «on» par lequel s’exprime, nous l’avons dit, la conscience collective d’une communauté épique. Le «on» de *Regain* est le «on» d’un narrateur-participant qui inclut et prend en même temps à témoin le lecteur virtuel auquel il s’adresse. Au début du roman, le «on» — qui apparaît tout de suite — est encore un «on» de voix collective, de communauté qui s’exprime en bloc : *On a beau partir plus tard de Manosque les jours où les pratiques font passer l’heure, quand on arrive à Vachères, c’est toujours midi.* (I, 323). Mais, comme en même temps apparaît le «vous» adressé au lecteur-auditeur, le «on» devient la marque d’une double participation, participation du narrateur à ce qu’il raconte et implication du lecteur — comme s’il y était, comme si «on» voulait le « mouiller » dans l’histoire : *Alors, que voulez-vous, on tire les paniers de dessous la banquette et on mange.* (I, 323). L’avantage du «on», c’est qu’il n’exclut personne, c’est qu’il met tout le monde dedans, le «je», le «tu», le «il», le «nous», le «vous» et le «ils» ”.<sup>1</sup>

To accompany this all inclusive approach in *Regain*, to give an effect of immediacy, of the unfolding of events and the illusion of contact with reality, Giono will make frequent use of several tenses within one paragraph. The following example (past, present, future and return to present) is chosen at random from among countless others:

“On a sorti la machine à aiguiser. Elle est là sur ses roues dans le droit fil d’un petit chemin. Elle va partir : Arsule est attelée.” (I,361)

One can conclude from this brief breakdown, that the narrative styles that Giono has employed play an important part in establishing the spontaneous oral quality of the early works by giving the impression of an immediate and universal human response to direct experience. This oral quality, in the tradition of local story telling, imparts to the works the simple appeal of the old folktales and legends which directly engage with the challenging

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

aspects of everyday living and which make use of the wisdom received from the ancients as a didactic element.

## PART ONE: THE LIVING WORLD

Taken as a whole, the three novels of the PAN cycle reveal a comprehensive picture of the basic elements of the universe that becomes Giono's "grand Tout". These elements are initially formed from facets of the natural world with which the author has been conversant all his life, and which he has transformed by the power of his imagination. Through a comparison of selected aspects of the books of the trilogy, and by using a systematic process of analysis, we can uncover the deliberate deconstruction of reality effected by the author through discrepancies and idiosyncratic elements which intrude into a description of the apparent factual reality of the world before him. At the same time as we examine this process, we will explore the various components and levels of society and countryside that Giono blends together, and the manner in which they synthesise to form the "building blocks" through which he reconstructs a physical dimension to his dream landscape and structures his communities; *id est* the manner in which, through the interplay of reality and the dream, he will build the world with which his human characters must interact in the universal experience of living to which the hearer/reader of these tales is invited to relate and respond.

### Geographic framework

#### A. An imaginary South

It has long been well-established (by Antonietto<sup>1</sup> and others) that Giono cannot be classed as a regionalist writer portraying a determined region, although his novels are almost all set in the areas surrounding his birth place, Manosque, or in Provence in general. He is, of course, completely familiar with this area where he has roamed the hills and plateaus since childhood, and where as a young adult he visited semi-deserted villages and isolated farms in his role of employee of the bank; but the Provence of Giono's novels is largely imaginary. Although the author situates his invented world geographically, using topographic realities and real names from places located in the area (chosen from the map beside his desk), he transports and redistributes names and places at will, or invents composites, while at the same time extending or compressing distances. He will also completely invent place-names, but these will always remain linguistically and phonetically appropriate for the region.

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<sup>1</sup>Francine Antonietto, *Le mythe de la Provence dans les premiers romans de Jean Giono*.

To discuss in detail but one example of Giono's treatment of geographic and sociological factors, Aubignane, the setting for *Regain*, is based on the near-deserted village of Redortiers, a hamlet which had impressed Giono as having an extraordinarily dramatic aspect. Luce Ricatte<sup>1</sup> sees the name of Aubignane as a compilation of the local village names, *Aubignosc* and *Simiane*. In the novel, and in real life, to travel from Manosque to Banon one must cross two plateaus. It is on one of these, in reality the plateau of Albion which runs up to the mountain of Lure, that Giono situates the forgotten village. But, requiring much more space and depth in order to give free rein to his imagination, Giono expands and exaggerates both size and distance. Through this device, he gives an epic dimension to the novel which allows for the sense of isolation in the large expanse of territory which forms the domain of the primitive hero, Panturle.

It is only very rarely that Giono gives his reader a straightforward description of the general landscape of the area he is creating. Rather he evokes it through such things as atmosphere, light, the selection and figuration of one or two features, or by impressionistic pictorial effects. The writer is solidly grounded in Provence. The region is so much a part of his life and soul, and he has such a profound appreciation of its beauty, and its darker aspects, that his method of expressing himself is almost always through an expression of his native land. But, as Antonietto has demonstrated, this particular patch of ground is only one aspect of the earth with which Giono feels in deep accord. It is the Earth that he is celebrating, by finding through his poet's eye the universal aspect in all things and beings. In his article, "L'Invention d'un Sud", Jean-Yves Laurichesse discusses the fact that there exists, in France, a distinct "littérature romanesque du Sud", "même si les meilleurs des écrivains qui l'illustrent se défient à raison de s'y laisser enfermer." Giono, he continues, "ne fait authentiquement *œuvre du Sud* que dans le dépassement d'un obstacle majeur, celui d'une réception conventionnelle de ses romans, dans le refus d'être ce que certains voudraient à tout prix voir en lui : un romancier provençal, chantre des collines, des paysans et de bergers." It is, of course, the works of Giono's "second manner" which are most removed from the traditional forms of regionalist literature, but, says Laurichesse, such an image of Giono's work is "déjà partielle et caricaturale en ce qui concerne les romans d'avant-guerre."<sup>2</sup> Laurichesse also makes the point, as others have done, that the "universalisation" of Giono's

<sup>1</sup> Luce Ricatte, "Notice" to *Regain*, I, p. 990

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Yves Laurichesse, "L'invention d'un Sud: Espace et Roman chez Jean Giono", in *L'Université de Perpignan. Tradition humaniste et modernité scientifique. De 1350 à 2000*, p.330

land of the South was guaranteed through the diversity of the reading material with which the developing author fed his imagination.

### B. Physical settings

In conversation with Jean Carrière, Giono discusses his general attitude towards what he sees before him :

“Tout est inventé. Rien n’est fonction du pays qui est sous mes yeux, et il participe du pays qui est sous mes yeux mais en passant à travers moi.”<sup>1</sup>

“On est forcé d’inventer à partir de quelque chose qui existe déjà. [...] C’est une adaptation, une transformation des choses vues par l’artiste.”<sup>2</sup>

To achieve this transformation in the early novels, Giono employs the technique of appearing to reproduce the reality of the landscape with some exactitude while constantly introducing discrepancies which modify the facts and tip his work into the realm of the imaginary. Claire Daudin<sup>3</sup>, in discussing *Colline*, points up that this technique causes the reader to become literally disorientated, not knowing whether or not to mistrust the given data which holds the illusion of evolving in defined space and time. This is intentionally disconcerting says Daudin. It invites the reader to look beyond the picturesque to the real sense of the work. In this way, any given indications of actual space and time have the effect of removing the world of the novelist from reality rather than grounding it. Giono draws on the rich reserve of images which constitute the landscape and customs of Provence, by making full use of the picturesque to reveal its essentially illusory nature. Thus it is the poetic world, a product of the writer’s mind, that becomes verified as the only reality.

In fabricating the substance of his southern realm, the use of physical levels as a feature of the landscape has a particular sociological and psychological significance for Giono’s world, and is found in all three novels of the PAN cycle. Giono’s use of levels will remain constant and resistant to the general inconsistencies involved in the process of deconstruction, because they have a clear moral symbolism in the light of his personal convictions – his well documented and discussed anti-urban, anti-modern attitudes. The lowlands contain the larger towns and are therefore associated with artificiality (the prosaic), even vulgarity or

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Carrière, *Jean Giono, Qui êtes-vous ?*, p.91

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp.144-45

<sup>3</sup> Claire Daudin, *Colline* p.77

corruption; the high, sparsely populated areas with a wild strength and a natural clarity, sometimes purity and often mystery (the poetic). In "Présentation de Pan" which was written later as a preface to the trilogy, Giono writes of the fascination that the mountain of Lure had for him as a child. "Lure! Me voilà hanté par ce mot."<sup>1</sup> For the child and for the poet, who is the adult with the openness of a child, Lure incarnates the unattainable, the mysterious, the pinnacle of the dream. It represents longings and desires that lie beyond the reach of the common lot of man. It will reveal its mysteries only to the initiates, the children of Pan, or "ceux qui savent".

"Ce qui vient de la ville est mauvais: le vent de la pluie et le facteur.

Personne ne contredit.

On préfère le vent du désert de Lure, qui coupe comme un rasoir, mais qui chasse les pies et indique, à ceux qui savent, le gîte caché des lièvres." (Colline.I,130/1)

In *Colline*, to set up the town/country opposition Giono compresses large distances to bring the mountain of Lure within close proximity to Manosque. The people of the town and those of the village are aware of the presence of the others living at a relatively close geographical distance, but there is minimal traffic between the two groups. Behind the hills, looming above the hamlet of les Bastides: "Lure, calme, bleue, domine le pays, bouchant l'ouest de son grand corps de montagne insensible." When the mountain mists lift the townspeople can see "les Bastides Blanches comme des colombes posées sur l'épaule de la colline." (I,130) Despite the picturesque imagery, the village exudes no magic or mystery for the townsfolk but has instead the atmosphere of a rural civilisation which exists on the margins of history; a tiny community which enjoys no real outside contact and which is of no significance. In turn, the peasants can just hear the bells of Manosque when the wind comes from the south, but rather than holding any attraction for them, they express reasons for staying away: "la ville est loin, les chemins sont durs" (I,130)

In *Un de Baumugnes*, Giono again makes use of three physical levels. Here, as well, whatever comes from the town is perceived by the isolated peasants as being evil. From Marseille (down at sea-level) has come le Louis, to seduce Angèle. Higher up, but still on the plain of the Durance which has become a place of mourning for Angèle and her kinsfolk, the land surrounding the farm settlement known as the Douloire (douleur) is "maigre" and

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<sup>1</sup> "Présentation de Pan", I, p.757

“mauvaise”, but as we will see, redeemable. Again, Giono presents a self-contained, very small community set in a land without time:

“[...] je marche sur la route durant une bonne heure sans voir personne, sans rencontrer de ferme, sans entendre de fontaine, et, dans la poussière, pas de traces de roues, rien que les trois cornes des pattes de pie.” (I,242)

Amédée feels a sense of direct physical menace on approaching the farm:

“[...] la mauvaise chose suintait de partout. Ça venait de ces os de roches, de cette couleur de jour malade, de ces buissons d'épines et poussières mêlées et surtout de cette Douloire, accroupie dans le pissat de ses fumiers, près de sa maigre terre, terne et croûteuse comme une vieille guenipe.” (I,243)

The very land and buildings reflect the despair of the inhabitants, and the hostility of the owner towards those who come from the outside. But from the elevated arena of the mountains hope and salvation comes for those at the Douloire, in the form of Albin from the land of the Baumugnes. This “grosse terre qui touche le ciel” (I,228) is so high above the ordinary sphere of mortal men that it becomes paradisiacal, part of Giono's fictional territory of the “au-delà”. The reality and the sterility of the neglected land of the plains exists in stark contrast to this mountainous area of liberation, which is suggested, rather than described. The author uses the adjectives *bon*, *beau*, *large* and *net* to depict this country where the trees are of “un droit élan” and the air is “aiguisé comme un sabre”. (I,228)

*Regain* begins with the climb from Manosque to Banon, which lies nestled in a hollow on the high plateau. A gradual ascent hill after hill: a gentle, rolling climb which can be perceived only through the changes in vegetation. Then the traveller sees the column of the clock tower, a distinctive and unusual blue “qui monte au-dessus des bois comme une fleur”. (I,323) This man-made edifice, painted a colour which for Giono often seems to signal expansion and mystery, and converted by the viewer's imagination into an offering of beauty from the natural world, sharply marks the end of civilisation (the prosaic) and the beginning of the wilderness (which denotes the fictional world of the poetic) and the steep and hard climb through Panturle's domain to the middle of the sky with the clouds and the ever-present wind. It is on the large isolated moor above Aubignane, in an elevated space that allows liberation, that the elemental forces of Pan and poetry will begin working the magic that brings restoration to the village.

### C. Historical setting

Giono continues to remould the landscape of the south by doing the same thing with temporal as he often does with spatial settings, introducing discrepancies which undermine and destabilise the assumptions made within a reader's mind. In general, in a further reflection of Giono's rejection of modernisation, the atmosphere evoked throughout all the works seems to belong to a rural civilisation vaguely situated somewhere in the mid-nineteenth century. The few given references to time or modernity are often anachronistic: for example, the "bidons d'essence éventrés" (I,130) with which Gagou builds his house in *Colline* belong in a community where the doctor from town must make a three hour climb by horse-drawn carriage to minister to those who are ill. Inconsistencies like this one serve only to confuse and disconcert, underlining the timeless quality of the worlds that have been created and preparing for the possibility of the unknown and unexpected. In *Colline*, through the little community of les Bastides Blanches, Giono depicts the immobility and isolation of the peasantry who, amidst strong traditions, lead a life measured by natural rhythms which have their roots in the dawn of time. While such an existence imposes a measure of everyday dignity and harmony, it is also one that is easily ruptured so that these qualities are soon dissipated by superstition and fear. The most stable and practical man of the community, Jaume, has all the corporeal solidity and common sense of the local Provençal peasant, yet fear induces such a sense of instability and unreality into his world that he feels the once solid earth to be as shaky beneath his feet "comme une planche de barque"(I,180)

Giono increases the suggestion of an unreal, mythical aspect to the atmosphere in *Colline* and reinforces the sense of a human community that has become suspended in time, by evoking a sense of the landscape of Ancient Greece. And in *Regain*, also, there is a strong evocation of the ancient Greece of legends in the landscape of the first part of the novel. The harsh hills and extreme climate create the perfect mythological setting, while the character of old Mamèche is an openly archetypal, mythic figure – a Rhéa-Déméter (Cybèle) /Earth-Mother, who enlists the help of the trees and the land to ensure the survival of the village. In *Colline*, many of the peasants are given names taken directly from antiquity, like César, and Alexandre (the delirious Janet believes himself re-named Auguste by a serpent). It was Aphrodis who unearthed the stone *lavoir*.

"On rince le linge dans un sarcophage de grès, taillé intérieurement à la ressemblance d'un homme mailloté." (I,129)

This ancient object, both utilitarian and artistic, is used regularly by all the women of the hamlet for the mundane and timeless chore of doing the washing, and is therefore an important and lively gathering place. Its presence underlines the profundity of the life/death



dichotomy of existence at the same time as it dismisses it in the bustle of everyday living. Such treatment is typical of the way Giono organises the world of the earliest novels into the prosaic and the poetic, the trivial and the consequential, examines the major contradictions of life and merges and mixes the boundaries in one large cosmic mélange. On the other side of the *lavoir* stands a fitting symbol : “Des piliers portant la boule du monde, avec le capuchon de mousse et des écritures en latin.” (I,130).

Paradoxically, the persistent remnants of a former civilisation are also reminders of the transient nature of human influence. One of the major and most persistent themes in the early work of Giono, already apparent in *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, soon makes its frightening appearance in this cycle. At their best, when applying the greatest of their skills, knowledge and intellect in an attempt to realise their dreams, humans merely achieve an on-going series of temporary transformations on the face of the earth. The reality is that nature is always eager, and eventually able, to claim back her stolen territory. Alan J. Clayton sees the relationship between humankind and the natural world throughout *Colline* as a series of balanced oppositions. Between these two orders exists “une provocation réciproque, constante : le propre de l'humain, c'est de faire reculer le sauvage ou de plaquer sur lui ses constructions, ses artifices (maisons, chemins, etc.) alors qu'il appartient au sauvage de dévorer les constructions humaines, de récupérer les terrains qu'il a dû céder à l'adversaire, bref de replonger l'humain dans le *redevenir*.”<sup>1</sup> In the Bastides, the great houses of the gentry (the intruders who used to come to take the bracing air) have returned to the earth. (Giono is depicting the de-population of the rural areas that he saw all around him when, in his role as a representative of the bank, he travelled across the Provençal countryside.) Only the dwellings of a remnant of peasants remain upright. Gagou, the primitive half-man half-animal, builds his cabin behind the ancient pillars, among the thistles, with the previously mentioned empty petrol cans. As with the houses of the other important characters, Gagou's house is a reflection of its occupant: it is incongruous in its setting, exists on the margins of the little society and is made of disposable material.

Further evidence of human impermanence is found in the following juxtaposition. Gondran's fertile orchard on the slopes has been planted where numerous small streams have left a rich alluvial deposit. But just below this bounty the streams combine (unite their strength) to form a torrent which has split the earth with “une fente étroite, noire, et qui

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<sup>1</sup> Alan J Clayton, *Pour une poétique de la parole chez Giono*, p.16

soufflé frais comme la bouche d'un abîme".(I,146) There is the strong sense of a living force, patiently waiting to destroy all that has been cultivated and to swallow up and claim back all that has been given. Giono underscores this feeling by the addition of this sentence : "Un vieil aqueduc romain l'enjambe : ses deux jarrets maigres et poudreux émergent des oliviers." (I,146)

The mythological quality of the settlements shapes the mindset of their human inhabitants. In *Naissance de l'Odyssée* we saw the deification of nature in the Hellenic tradition. Here the evocation of early Greece suggests the continuation of that attitude, although a belief in specific deities has been replaced by a more overt form of the general superstitious readiness of Giono's peasants to accredit supernatural powers to the elemental forces.

### **Images of integration**

If the author quickly establishes the reality of the state of opposition and provocation between humans and nature that A.J. Clayton has identified, from the commencement of these works an outworking of the holistic dream of cosmic union through poetic reconstruction is also already in play. The first page of the PAN trilogy establishes the most striking and important aspect of the universe belonging to these early novels of Giono – the interdependence of all things. The lyrical prose poem at the beginning of *Colline*, which introduces us to the Bastides, immediately incarnates the concept of nature as an animate force. The strength of this life-force swells in the plants and trees, in "blés drus et hauts, and des bouleaux gluants de sève douce" and surges through the blood of the teeming wildlife, while anthropomorphic images increase the impression of a mix of abundant life :

"La chair de la terre se plie en bourrelets gras; le surplus d'une fontaine chante en deux sources; le vent bourdonne; le sainfoin fleuri saigne ; les avettes dansent ; les grands arbres gesticulent." (I,127)

The vitality of the universal life force is more openly presented in *Colline* and *Regain* than it is in the second novel of the trilogy where, for most of the duration of the story it is repressed and confined; but throughout the entire PAN trilogy, as Giono makes constant use of metaphor and simile to portray the unity of the cosmos, the different ways in which he elects to combine his images results in the emphasis falling directly onto this force as the orchestrator of all things. He draws the components for his images from the immediate environment, combining and mixing them in a variety of ways to form a strong, vital

synthesis, as he does in the following examples chosen from the many to be found in *Colline*. In the first of these, the author seems to give a concrete but temporary form to his “au delà”, by constructing an entire country from vapour in the sky. The second example anthropomorphises the heavens, while incorporating into the mix colours and shapes drawn from the plant kingdom:

“Il y en a un [nuage] qui s’appuie pesamment sur le dos des collines comme une montagne du ciel; comme un pays du ciel, un grand pays tout désert, avec des vals ombreux, des croupes nues où le soleil glisse, des escarpements étagés.” (I,158)

“Une épaisse couronne de violettes pèse sur le front pur du ciel. À travers cette brume le soleil monte pareil à une grenade ”(I,153)

And in these further examples, selected from *Regain*, two of the elements undergo a comparison with animals which enforces the impression that they possess a consciousness: The first depicts the rain (water) as untamed but in a gentle mood; the second portrays the land (earth) as domesticated but neglected:

“Et puis, aujourd’hui, il y a eu la pluie. Elle est venue comme un oiseau, elle s’est posée, elle est partie ; on a vu l’ombre de ses ailes passer sur les collines des Névières.” (I,344)

[...] “à travers une terre malade de lèpre comme une vieille chienne qui perd ses poils.” (I,325)

The various components that make up the concrete imagery of this synthesised universe are not only drawn from the surrounding natural world. Man-made objects which are the product of human creativity, can also become ingredients. In *Colline*, the son of Maurras stands looking at the row of houses in the still air of an early morning :

“Elles dorment encore, sans bruit, comme des bêtes fatiguées. Seule, celle de Gondran hoquette doucement derrière sa haie. [...] la maison a les yeux ouverts, de grands yeux clairs sur lesquels passe, comme le roulement d’une prune, l’ombre ronde de Marguerite. Son portail ouvert bave un fil d’eau de vaisselle.” (I,153)

Anthropomorphic images are a striking aspect of the mix of natural features and elements which Giono uses to form his word pictures and there is an abundance of them to be found throughout all the works of the trilogy. There are times, also, when through a reversal of the anthropomorphic process humans become animal-like. The most obvious example is the character of Gagou in *Colline*, the simpleton of the village, a mute creature of instinct who is much closer to nature than those more capable of rational thought. (This favouring of instinct is also a reflection of Giono’s celebrated anti-intellectual attitude). To depict this strong

association, Giono makes use of images from the animal realm to create a creature which is almost half man, half beast :

“Puis il dansa, a la manière des marmottes, en balançant ses mains pendantes. (I,129)

D’instinct, à présent qu’il est sur le territoire de la sauvagine, il a pris l’allure inquiète et rasée d’une bête.” (I,166)

The fact that this process of anthropomorphism extends not only to the things to be found in nature but to man-made things, seems to endorse Giono’s love of the artisan and suggests that some of the soul of their creator lives on within things fashioned or even planted with human hands. In *Colline* : “À la ressemblance des hommes les maisons”. In front of his, Jaume has planted a green vine which “embroussaille” the dwelling and “imite dessus la porte la longue moustache de Gaulois qui pend sur la bouche du propriétaire”. (I,129) In *Un de Baumugnes*, the body of the farm which was once her family home but has now become the place where she is incarcerated is, by extension, the body of Angèle. “La Douloire dormait et, dans son sommeil, elle laissait voir son corps de pauvresse.” (I,250) And the little cartwright from *Regain*, Gaubert, who has worked too much, and more with his heart than with his arms, lives in a forge which is now “froide et morte”(I,332). But the tools of his trade, the hammer and anvil, are animate objects that seem created to be conjoined with his living body :

“Mais, il y a encore l’enclume et, autour d’elle comme un cal, la place nette, tannée par les pieds du forgeron. L’enclume est toute luisante, toute vivante, claire, prête à chanter. Contre elle, il y a aussi un marteau pour « frapper devant ». Le bois du manche luit du même bon air que l’enclume.” (I,332)

This extension of the human soul into the created object, further strengthens Giono’s promotion of the mind’s ability to creatively bridge the gap which exists between humankind and the rest of the world.

Another striking aspect of the imagery to be found in the novels, as a manifestation of the symbiotic man-nature relationship which Giono promotes at this period of his writing, is a direct and obvious integration of the characters into the landscape. This integration can be so complete that the characters take on the physical aspects of the land that surrounds them. In this way, the character of Albin in *Un de Baumugnes*, speaks of “mon pays dans moi”, (I,224) (which could serve as an epithet for Giono) and continues:

“Les choses de la terre, mon vieux, j’ai tant vécu avec elles, j’ai tant fait ma vie dans l’espace qu’elles laissaient, j’ai tant eu d’amis arbres, le vent s’est tant frotté contre moi que, quand j’ai de la peine, c’est à elles que je pense pour la consolation.” (I,224)

Albin is the product of a clear and clean country, above the troubled towns and plains. That his inner character has been shaped by his environment is made evident by the images chosen to describe his features : “des yeux d’eau claire qui débordaient sur ses joues and un rire comme de la neige.” (I,222)

Janet (*Colline*) is Giono’s most striking example of a character incorporated into nature, of which he seems to express all the secrets. Janet is a type of mediator between nature and humans, warning men of the consequences of their destructive actions on the earth. But the old man also embodies the malevolent side to the “panique/creative” force, through an abuse of power manifesting as manipulation through fear. The narrator describes his physical body as: “Droit, dur comme un tronc de laurier, ses lèvres minces fendent à peine le buis rasé de sa figure.” (I,131) Giono moves aside from the usual pliable, rounded forms of the natural world using adjectives such as *droit* and *dur* to express this negative aspect. Further, he makes use of an association with minerals to describe the old invalid’s “rébarbative allure”(I,137) :

“[...] bleu de granit, arêtes dures du nez, narines translucides comme le rebord du silex. Un œil ouvert dans l’ombre luit d’une lueur de pierre.” (I,137)

There is another way in which Janet’s amalgamation with the landscape is strongly drawn. The close association of the human voice and water, already seen in Giono’s first novel, persists in these novels of the PAN cycle where the verbs *parler* and *chanter* are used frequently to describe the flow of water and the word *couler* for words. The identification of Janet with the liquid element is particularly strong in *Colline* and quickly established. Lying on his bed, Janet begins to speak of his interior world “sans arrêt, comme une fontaine” (I,133) The torrent of words, “coule comme un ruisseau” (I,141), and when his son-in-law, unable to grasp their meaning, tries to recall them in order to repeat them to others, “c’est comme de l’eau, ça ne tient pas dans les mains serrées”. (I,154). Janet is strongly associated, in the minds of the villagers, with the drying up of the spring. Being the one who originally divined its source gives him a certain prestige among his neighbours who at first look to him to give them the answer to its dying, but soon come to believe that he is responsible for their troubles. Jaume, the practical realist, has a bitter reaction to the words of Janet which is similar to the rage of Telemachus against the words of his father in *Naissance* – a fierce

revolt against the powers of fiction, made evident through the passage where Jaume thinks of previous tragedies which have befallen the village and now accuses Janet of having caused them all: “Pas avec tes mains, sûr, avec ta langue, ta pute de langue.” (I,189) As he stares down at Janet’s face on the pillow he sees there “un sombre liquide gargouille au fond de sa bouche ouverte.” (I,182) This vivid image depicts what Jaume believes to be the very source of Janet’s power – it lies in the skilful use of speech that enables him to influence others by building on their fear. The use of such imagery to depict the one basic human faculty which can be used to control the minds of others for positive or negative outcomes, again reinforces the pre-eminence given to the close association of water and the imaginative word.

In *Regain*, the integration of the human characters into the landscape becomes a dominant theme. It is particularly evident and direct in the form of the two last inhabitants of the dying village, Panturle and Mamèche, who are hunter-gatherers relying on the most primitive methods of survival. In summer, Panturle, who is a huge man, looks like “un morceau de bois qui marche.” (I,329) He has made himself a sun-curtain out of fig-leaves and when he stands erect he resembles a tree:

“Sa chemise pend en lambeaux comme une écorce. Il a une grande lèvre épaisse et difforme, comme une poivron rouge.” (I,330)

Although he takes on another appearance in winter, he is still depicted in terms of the local flora and fauna:

“Panturle a pris sa vraie figure d’hiver. Le poil de ses joues s’est allongé, s’est emmêlé comme l’habit des moutons. C’est un buisson. Avant de commencer à manger, il écarte les poils autour de sa bouche.” (I,342)

In the final passage, the striking image which ends the book shows that through the process of restoration and renewal that he has gone through, Panturle has finally reached the ultimate goal by unequivocally becoming one with the very substance of the landscape.

Il est debout devant ses champs. Il a ses grands pantalons de velours brun, à côtes ; il semble vêtu avec un morceau de ses labours. Les bras le long du corps, il ne bouge pas. Il a gagné: c’est fini.

Il est solidement enfoncé dans la terre comme une colonne.” (I,429)

### The senses

In the introductory remarks to this chapter we discussed how, through a process of internalisation of the viewed landscape, Giono’s early characters find their everyday experiences imaginatively transformed. The incorporation of human beings into the

landscape is only the imaginative augmentation of something that Giono portrays as being a natural part of the very essence of the individual peasant character born to toil on the land. Through the frequent juxtaposition of the ordinary with the unusual, he sharpens his picture of the everyday existence of his humans as they live and work in a world to which they are strongly linked through their senses.<sup>1</sup>

Sight: Giono is above all a visual writer. As we have seen with some of the images given above, the early novels present an ever abundant mix of rich colours and shapes, blended with light, shadow and movement with which he constructs his universe. With some visual images, however, Giono employs the deconstructive technique of inverting the usual system of values. He will take a material fragment of no particular importance, or which is but one feature of a recognised integrated unit, and describe it in complete isolation so that it becomes the sole point of focus – abstracted from its surroundings as if it belonged to another world.

“La lampe baisse. La boule de lumière se rétrécit. Le nez de Babette, ce n’est plus qu’un petit triangle pâle, sans nom.” (*Colline*, 194)

Or the author manages to achieve a similar effect of destabilisation by employing what will be a favourite and enduring device in his novels: revealing to the eyes of a character some unusual (or important) aspect of the everyday background to their life: dramatising it by lifting or moving aside a curtain or screen :

“L’après-midi, une fois la brume levée, on commença à voir le pays et la garce de Durance en train de manger les terres.” (*Un de Baumugnes*, 276)

He has a fondness, also, for setting a diffuse area of light within a frame, thereby defining it to bring it into sharp focus and make it the dominant feature of a scene.

“Dehors, c’est la belle lune et il est resté tout malade contre cette belle lune qui fait déborder le bassin de la vitre jusque près de l’âtre.” (*Regain*, 368)

Moonlight holds a place of particular importance in Giono’s writing. Shadows do not mean obscurity. Nocturnal scenes are present in all three books of the trilogy and become as clearly visible and important as those seen during the light of day. (The nocturnal aspect of Giono’s work will be explored fully in the chapter on *Le Chant du monde*.) The shadow

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<sup>1</sup> As well as being used to demonstrate this relationship between the human characters and their world, on another level the vivid concrete images that form the universe of Giono’s novels stimulate a response by holding a direct appeal to the five senses of the reader. As Redfern has noted, “Giono’s images are meant to be literally striking; to transport us forcibly to the scenes he describes, and to make us take notice.” *The Private World of Jean Giono*, p.120. The best of these, says Redfern, can make a scene immediately present to the reader’s eye, and in this way induce the “required shock of recognition.”(ibid) The poet’s task, again, is to find and express those things that are universal.

world of the night has the ability to transform the things of the day by completely changing and distorting usual perspectives in order to visually redesign the world.

“Voyez : l’ombre du cyprès noircit peu à peu et se dessine sur l’herbe. (*Colline*, 165),  
and

“La lune fait de Gagou un être étrange. [...] Il a courbé sa longue échine ; le cou dans les épaules, il va la tête penchée en avant ; ses grand bras pendent jusqu’au sol comme deux pattes. Ainsi, il est doublé d’un monstrueux quadrupède d’ombre qui bondit à ses côtés.”  
(*Colline*, 166)

Those with the gift of discernment are granted a fresh aspect of the familiar, and with it the opportunity to look into the very essence of a thing.

And in a world where clocks seem to be almost non-existent, it is a perception of the movement of light which must become the general measure of time. Within the repeating cycle of the seasons which signal the passing of the year, the days and nights mark the passage of the weeks and the movement of the sun the passage of a day. Thus, Gondran can work steadily in his orchard throughout a morning and know exactly when to stop for his midday meal.

“L’ombre des oliviers s’est peu à peu rétrécie ; tout à l’heure, comme un tapis fleuri de taches d’or, elle tenait tout le champ. Sous les rais de plus droits elle s’est morcelée, puis arrondie. Maintenant, elle n’est plus que gouttes grises autour des troncs.

C’est midi.” (I,146)

This process of describing the movement of light reinforces Giono’s practice of using concrete imagery to portray the abstract and gives a certain visibility to the concept of time. Paradoxically, because they are perpetual, the light patterns that are formed in this manner can also be considered to be timeless.

Sound/Hearing: Giono will sometimes work with sound imagery in a similar way to his method of separating things out visually. He will isolate and amplify the most ordinary of everyday sounds by the suppression of other noises. Such sounds can be almost inaudible: the “grincement” of a green fruit being sliced is found in *Colline*. Everyday noises which are usually ignored by human ears can become resoundingly loud, as when a large dog drinks from the Gaudissart stream and “on entendait l’eau qui descendait son gosier par blocs épais” (I,366) Or they can be unusual sounds, perhaps even terrifying to the hearer, which are amplified to the point where they seem to fill the universe of the listener; as in *Regain* when the wind on the plateau causes the fig trees to scratch the walls of the barn and their huge



stumps to “gronder” in the earth under the stones (I, 360). When Gédémus walks on the plateau in the same novel, under his feet “il y avait ce sol poreux qui sonne comme un plafond de cave” (I,362). In *Colline* it is the *silence* that resounds, when the usual background noise of the fountain suddenly ceases. “Il y a une place vide dans l’air”. (I,159).

Nature is saturated with its own language in a constant chorus which never ceases to remind human ears of the unity of living things. Previous examples have shown that the grass and the trees have their own specific song and the wind, with all its multiple personalities, becomes multi-voiced and tangible partly through sound. In *Colline*’s deserted village, “dans les rues pleines d’orties le vent ronfle, chante, beugle, hurle sa musique par les trous des fenêtres sans volets et des portes béantes.” (I,166). On the heights of Aubignane the wind seems to be ever present, to the extent that its sound completely fills Panturle’s head at a time of intense desire. “Dans le vide de sa tête, seul le vent sonne, et son désir.” (I,373) Water, of course, adds its voice to the mix. The spring in *Colline*, the friend and focal point of the village, is “la chanteuse” (I,128) to the ears of the peasants. In *Un de Baumugnes* the Durance swells enough to “gratter” against the trees (I, 265) providing a warning that must be heeded by all those creatures who are attuned to nature and thus have the ability to hear. And the untamed stream in *Regain* falls over a rock to add its volume to the pool beneath with a “roule du tambour”. (I,373)

There are some other points worth briefly noting in the general area of sound within the novels. In her study on *Colline*<sup>1</sup>, Claire Daudin describes the way Giono uses alliteration, and gives the example of Gondran, alone amongst the eerie silence that has fallen on les Bastides, joyfully listening to the comforting sound of “le grignotis des petites pattes onglées” (I,145) as his dog walks behind him. Daudin points out that Giono also plays with onomatopoeia, searching for the vigour of sensation through the use of sounds deprived of sense. When the half-man, half-animal Gagou walks: “ses pas font floc, floc”. (I,157) And the other hybrid creature deprived of speech, the toad of Janet’s story who has the hands and the eyes of a man: “il faisait clou, clou”. (I,142) Says Daudin: “ Sous l’apparence d’une plus grande simplicité, le langage de Giono vise ici à retrouver la puissance primitive des sons, à nous transporter dans un univers sonore qui ne nous laisse pas indemnes. ”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Claire Daudin, *Colline*. p.58

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.59

Taste and Smell: Throughout the early novels, there is the constant evocation of the natural scents which are familiar to all humans, such as the perfumes and odours of flowers and trees, the acrid smell of smoke and the muskiness of beasts. But there are also those scents which are usually perceived by animals alone, which Giono makes available to humans so that the interdependence of nature seems to be underlined by a destabilisation in the traditional status of various living creatures. In *Colline*, Jaume sniffs at the air to smell for water. In *Regain*, Mamèche turns to the south searching for the first signs of Spring, sniffing up long breaths. And other odours of nature are perceived by the characters as taste sensations, as in this passage from *Regain*: “Il a reconnu la nuit au goût de l’air dans son nez.” (I,375)

Yet alongside these descriptions which seem to portray man as simple animal, there are passages evoking the physical and psychological satisfactions of eating in company which cement the important relationships and interdependence to be found within the human community itself. In *Colline*, the peasants collectively enjoy a cabbage and potato soup which “tient au ventre et fait du bon sang net” (I,158). In *Regain*, the meal Arsule serves to her new neighbours provides a feast for the eyes as well as for the palate in a communal celebration of life:

“[...] la bonne soupe d’Arsule, une pleine écuellée que les bords en étaient baveux, puis encore une, avec tous les légumes entiers, avec les poireaux blancs comme des poissons et des pommes de terre fondantes, et les carottes et tout le goût que ça laisse dans la bouche. Il y a eu une grande taillade de jambon maigre avec un liséré de gras qui miroite comme de la glace de fontaine. Puis il y a eu le fromage jauni entre les feuilles de noyer et parfumé aux petites herbes.” (I, 422)

Beyond the satisfaction to mind and body which is to be derived from the sensation of taste, the author also gives another nod to human specificity through an association of the taste of food with ideas, or with moral values. We have suggested that stimulation of the senses is, for Giono, closely associated with stimulation of the thought processes to produce images by association. The following is an excellent example of the way that some external factor, in this case one that is literally incorporated into the human body through the process of mastication, is also incorporated into the mind through an emotional reaction produced by the senses. As he is eating a raw onion for his supper, Gondran has a vivid poetic image of Janet as a sprouting seed. And while taste and texture are not mentioned, the process of eating is described in such detail that we can almost feel the sensation which stimulates the thought:

“Il l’a coupé par le milieu. Il défait une à une les côtes concentriques, les trempe dans la salière et les croque. [...] Gondran mange. L’oignon craque sous ses dents.” (I,136)

In *Un de Baumugnes*, the honest and direct response of Albin to his question, gives rise to a deep emotion of respect within Amédée, and is received as a taste sensation by the older man: “C’est venu, clair et franc, sans lie, sans arrière-pensée, comme un verre de marc.” (I,273)

Touch: To convey the sense of touch, Giono carefully selects an array of tactile adjectives and images which give the illusion of a direct contact of the body with elements from the external world. From *Colline*, the episode of the boar wallowing in the mud of the spring, provides an excellent example.

“Le voilà. Il se vautre sur l’eau. La boue est contre son ventre.

La fraîcheur le traverse d’outre en outre, de son ventre à son échine.

Il mord la source.

Contre sa peau ballotte la douce fraîcheur de l’eau”(I,128)

In *Un de Baumugnes*, Giono establishes the importance of some form of bodily contact in deepening human interaction:

“Albin plaça le petit solidement en selle sur le creux de son coude. [...] Lui, il entourait mes épaules de son bras libre. Ah ! Un beau poids, je vous assure, bien ami, bien franc.” (I,313)

And as with *Colline*, there are numerous examples to be found in *Regain* which stress the bodily integration of humans with the surrounding natural world as in this example where Panturle climbs a tree:

“Panturle embrasse le tronc gluant et il monte en faisant les ciseaux avec ses genoux, en lançant ses grandes mains qui se referment sur le rond des branches en tirant des bras, glissant des reins, de la résine plein les doigts.” (I,373)

Here the author makes use of adjectives and nouns of contact, and verbs which suggest the intensity and sensuality of the physical effort involved in interaction with the natural world.

### **The elements**

As should be evident from the examples already given in this chapter, the metaphoric images that Giono uses to describe the character of the natural world depend largely on the language of the body, whether human or animal. This literal embodiment of nature culminates in the concept of Pan. Half-man, half-beast, in Greek mythology he is the god (controlling life force) of all the flora and fauna of the fields and woods, whose name signifies “all” because his influence on humans is equally inescapable. In Giono’s vision, Pan

fuses all the forces of nature from the most formidable power to the gentlest sigh and it is through the imaginative depiction of these forces in the form of the elements, that the author reveals the multiple moods of the god.

Earth: In *Colline*, Giono's choice of a one word title demonstrates the importance of this element for which men feel the strongest affinity. Earth can provide humans with the security of a solid and eternal support; yet it is far from an inert mass. It is a living entity: Giono talks of its "flesh" and its "blood" and tucks Les Bastides, almost protectively, into one of its plump rolls. But along with the existence of the traditional providential and maternal aspect that is commonly associated with this matrix for the human species, is an opposite, destructive face. Earth is a sleeping beast, but one which bears the scars and wounds of human exploitation and which will awaken from time to time to vent its rage.

In *Un de Baumugnes* the earth is no longer the natural terrain which is generally present in *Colline*. This is domesticated land that through being cultivated for generations has taken on the aspect of those who live and work on it. There is therefore here no overtly destructive facet to this element in this work, but an underlying negativity that is displayed through a lack of fertility and a failure to provide adequate nourishment for humans. The personal well-being of the peasantry is directly tied to that of the earth which they must toil on and grapple with every day. Again the interdependence of man and nature is paramount. Because the humans are suffering and therefore distracted from (or unable to perform) their essential daily tasks, the land suffers from neglect and Giono uses adjectives such as "mauvaise" and "fatiguée" to describe it. As the humans are gradually healed, the earth itself is restored to health so that by the end of the novel it has become "une terre à primeurs". (I,315)

*Regain* gains its title from the term given to the re-growth of grass after the first mowing of the hay and, by extension, the reference here is to the renewal of productivity in the land. *Regain*, as in *regagner*, also suggests the revival of the village as the result of a hard-fought conquest with the earth. The stony, thorny ground surrounding the village has reverted quickly to its wild state. It must be tamed again through the reality of everyday work. It is responsive and alive when Panturle ploughs it, and initially reveals its still savage personality by fighting back. Panturle must become completely involved body to body with the land through the commitment of all his physical effort, his will power and his skill, in order to tame it and win from it life-giving food.

The association of humanity with the earth takes its most extreme form through another constant theme found within the early works. Introduced in *PAN* – most strongly and directly in *Regain* – is the idea of beings returning to the earth after death to become part of the food-producing soil so that tangible life is prolonged. This aspect of the natural life cycle links Mamèche more closely with the local earth than perhaps any other character. Both her husband and her infant son are incorporated within the ground she lives on, as she herself waits to become a part of its very substance.

Water: Along with the symbolism inherent in the word/water imagery, which has been discussed, there is a general recognition in the novels that water is essential to life and it is often used in broader terms as a symbol of life and strength. In *Colline*, the spring is the focal point of the village and its “life-blood,” not only because it provides an essential element for the sustaining of life, but also because it acts as a meeting place for humans and wildlife until this harmony is shattered by one man’s act of violence with a rifle. As the water dries up, the spirit of the village dries up. While the rest of the villagers must then endure a drought, Gagou uses his animal-like instincts to sniff out water. He finds, hidden in the hills, the skeletal remains of a deserted village reduced to nothing more than “un tas d’os brisés”. (I,168). But there is one sharply defined area that supports abundant life. Because the central village fountain continues to flow, plants spurt from between the surrounding paving stones everywhere the water gushes forth. The life-force is evident in the sexual imagery, the vitality and power of the pillar of water emerging from the old fountain. But this same element, in the same novel, *Colline*, can also take on the gentle form of a nymph: “elle glisse doucement, du pré à la venelle, sur la pointe de ses petits pieds blancs.” (I,144) Just as the earth does, water expresses the extreme duality inherent in the consciousness of the natural world.

In *Un de Baumugnes*, water represents strength and purity through the multiple references to snow, ice and mountain streams which characterise the land of the Baumugnes. Albin (*albinos*) himself, has eyes like clear water and a laugh like snow, characteristics which portray his lack of duplicity. When far from home water enters his dreams as a form of comfort:

“Il me semble que ma maman est là et qu’elle a apporté tout le torrent de Baumugnes, et qu’elle me verse l’eau sur la tête. C’est frais, c’est bon, c’est plein de fleurs. C’est des caresses de ma mère et des lèvres de l’eau.” (I,235)

Strong emotions described in terms of water images are common in the book. Amédée, feeling sympathy for Albin, tells us: “ça creva dans moi comme une eau qui pèse sur une digue de terre puis gagne, renverse et inonde le verger”(I,238) ; and when his thinking is suddenly thrown into turmoil : “la tête m’en tourne comme une roue d’eau” (I,259). It is natural, therefore, for Albin to refer to the great heaviness that he carries inside in terms of this element:

“[...] ça m’est entré dedans petit à petit comme un fil d’eau, et maintenant, c’est gros et lourd sur mes jambes et ça m’empêche d’être heureux au soleil.” (I,222)

The Durance, that has formed the plain where the Douloire sits, has a ongoing influence on the life of the inhabitants of the farm. When the mood of this element changes, its tremendous power can bring sudden destruction to humans:

“Dans cette belle eau dodue, le pied vous perd, le courant vous traîne et on vous trouve (quand on vous trouve) des jours après, en train de tourner dans un trou avec un ventre comme une pastèque de comice agricole.” (I,241)

And Amédée has a portent of disaster: “C’était un homme qui avait un rendez-vous avec la mort: avec la mort de l’eau.” (I,305). In the eternal cycle, however, new life will always overcome death, and it is the Durance which waters the once again productive fields of this same man, at the end of the book.

In *Regain* it is the earth and the wind that take centre stage, but water in the form of the Gaudissart stream is a prominent part of the life that remains in the near-deserted village. The stream is another strong personality with different moods. Capable of being both a friendly, companionable provider and a foe for man, it again incarnates the two sides of nature, the benevolent and the malevolent, that are present throughout the trilogy. Like the earth, it appears to have reverted quickly to its wild state without the domesticating influence of humans. Giono presents it as a living beast in its lair:

“Le ruisseau Gaudissart coule un bon moment sur les herbes couchées, puis il commence à s’enrager contre les rochers, et, à la fin, il s’enfonce dans la colline. Il a tranché de grands bancs de pierre, il est descendu au fond de la colline, il est là, dans une nuit grise, à ronronner. C’est son nid. Des fois, il fait gonfler son beau ventre tout écaillé d’écume ; des fois il s’étire entre deux os aigus de la roche ; des fois il fait nuit tout à fait et alors on voit seulement son gros œil couleur d’herbe qui clignote et qui guette.” (I,372)

Panturle knows the stream like the back of his hand. Despite this, when he falls in it almost kills him, as foaming with anger it carries him along in its powerful grip. In the end it relents and purifies him by calming his ardour, before releasing him to his rescuers. Later, when

Panturle has ploughed and tamed the land, the stream, too, takes on a different demeanour. When Arsule and the children of the new settlers go down to its banks, the brook is no longer wild, but perhaps no longer free, and a little grumpy in its domesticity :

“Il était tout emmoustaché d’herbes sales et grognon parce que les pluies lui ont donné pas mal d’eau. Alors il se plaint. Il se plaint de graisse. Il n’est jamais content. L’été il est là à gémir qu’il va mourir, et puis...c’est toujours comme ça les ruisseaux.”(I,424)

Air: Throughout the books of PAN, air, both moving and still, is of major importance. The wind is almost always present and accompanies most of the action. It assumes different “personalities” through movement and sound and has its visibility in skylscapes and the movement of vegetation. So important is the wind, that when there is an absence of any movement in the outside air Giono almost always defines it. Even then, he can make it tangible:

“Tout l’air du soir semble se coaguler en silence.” (*Colline*. I,151)

“L’air est comme un sirop d’aromates, tout épaissi d’odeur et chaud, au fond.” (*Colline*, I,190)

In *Colline*, Giono makes dramatic use of the wind for atmosphere, to intensify the feeling of growing menace.

“Tout le jour, le fleuve du vent s’est rué dans les cuvettes de la Drôme.[...] Maintenant, il siffle autour des Bastides dans les flûtes de pierre que les torrents ont creusées.

Les bois dansent. [...]

La porte du grenier saute sur ses gonds. On dirait que, là-haut, on écrase une portée de chatons à coups de talon. La nuit vient ; le vent prend de la gueule. Le ciel sonne comme une voûte de tôle sous la grêle.” (I,136)

And then uses this same wind to sweep clean, in order to prepare a new canvas. The scene following the storm is clear, crisp and sharp – and expectant :

“Après dix heures de vent du nuit, c’est un jour tout neuf qui se lève ce matin. Les premiers rayons du soleil entrent dans un air vide ; à peine envolés ils sont déjà sur les lointaines collines entre les genévriers et sur le thym. On dirait que ces terres se sont avancées depuis hier.

« On les toucherait avec la main » pense Gondran. Le ciel est bleu d’un bord à l’autre. Le profil des herbes est net, et tous les verts sont perceptibles dans la tache verte des champs [...]. Au sommet de pins, on compterait les aiguilles.

Il y a quelque chose d’étrange, aussi : le silence.” (I,143)

In *Un de Baumugnes* the wind/air is associated with music throughout. It is the voice of the mountains, which couched in the music of Albin's harmonica carries all the magic of that land to the imprisoned Angèle. And when Albin begins to speak of his home, the breath from his body has the same power:

“C’était parti du moment où le nom de son village lui était monté à la bouche. De ce coup, ce son de langue, ce ne fut plus la voix d’un homme. [...] c’était grave, profond, de long souffle et de même verte force que le vent.” (I,237)

In *Regain*, Giono makes much use of the elements to portray the rhythm of the seasons and the cycle of death and rebirth. The wind is ever present as another character, and in particular is used to signal the seasons through a change in its mood. The wind of spring is the herald of the renewal of life both for nature and for humans. It symbolically empties Panturle, by pressing against him so that he imagines his thoughts flowing from him to be absorbed by the earth and grass. In this way it prepares him for the new beginning to his life, so that he feels “tout neuf” and “tout blanc”(I, 365) It purifies Arsule as well, caresses her to awaken desire, and acts as a friend to Panturle, helping to lead him to her:

“[...] le vent le ceinture d’un bras tiède et l’emmène avec lui. [...] il lui semble partir en promenade avec un ami.”(I,365)

Fire: This, the most dramatic of the elements, is of extreme importance in *Colline* where it is depicted as a hostile beast, a great dragon, devouring the domain of humans (prefigured by the wild boar which intrudes into the human world). The battle for control over the fire by the villagers, led by Jaume, is symbolic of the battle for supremacy between nature and humankind.

In *Regain*, fire is associated with human order as Giono concedes to his people some governance of nature through domesticity. When Panturle in his wild state cooks a little, striking a light with flint, his fire is still untamed:

“Le feu d’oliviers, c’est bon parce que ça prend vite mais c’est tout juste comme un poulain, ça danse en beauté sans penser au travail. Comme la flamme indocile se cabre contre le chaudron, Panturle la mate en tapant sur le braises avec le plat de sa main dure.” (I, 332)



Giono selects a packet of matches which hold fire in a controlled form as the first of Arsule's housekeeping tools through which she will bring order and comfort to the house. As well, Vieignes<sup>1</sup> notes that under its solar form fire is associated with bread, the symbol of domestication, as the bread that Panturle brings back to Arsule is the sort from which a long, straight straw, flashing like "un rayon de soleil" (I,390) can be drawn. The loaf shows Panturle what he will re-create. It embodies his dream (which is also Giono's dream of the co-operation of humans and nature). The three of them together, Panturle, Arsule and the earth will all make bread.

We can conclude that the four essential elements of ancient cosmology are highlighted throughout the trilogy by the use of imagery which evokes a primal pagan world and which gives the creative/destructive force a powerful conscious will by mixing its elements into one entity. We can also find examples where Giono's vision of a fusion of all the forces of nature in all its moods, leads him to form associations of all the elements, by using a verb or adjective which is strongly associated with one and applying it to another. An example taken from *Colline* mixes air with water and earth: "La brume violette commence à couler dans les bas-fonds comme un fleuve de boue." (I,154) Another example uses nouns adjectivally to achieve a similar effect and combine the animal kingdom, earth, water and fire: "La bête souple du feu [...] qui tordait parmi les collines son large corps pareil à un torrent." (I,192). From *Regain* comes a simile which presents the unlikely comparison of air and stone: "Il vient buter de la bouche contre une masse d'air dur comme de la pierre." (I,374). This mix has the effect of intensifying the impact of the image and of underlining the interdependence of all things. Above all, it exalts the power of poetic language which for Giono is so much an essential part of the expression of his individual, natural world, that it becomes an additional, equally powerful, element of nature. At this point, it is worth repeating Giono's own statement in this respect:

"C'est la puissance poétique, une force comme les quatre éléments. Il y en a cinq: l'eau, la terre, le feu, l'air, la poésie." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Vieignes, *Regain : Profil d'une œuvre*, p.37

<sup>2</sup> Giono, from notes made towards the composition of *Pour saluer Melville*, cited III, p.1099

## PART TWO: HUMANS IN COMMUNITY

Having examined the components of the restructured corporeal world with which Giono's humans must interact, in order to give a complete picture of his concept of "le grand Tout" we should now consider his treatment of humans in society and the social interaction which takes place between his villagers. All the while, in systematically examining selected aspects of humans in community it is necessary to bear in mind that Giono's dream of universal harmony is a poetic vision, an attempt to heal the rupture between such communities and the surrounding natural world – to dismantle what he often labels as "la grande barrière".<sup>1</sup> The idea of a frontier between two different realms – a separation of the world into two halves – presents a concrete form of the author's concept of a breakdown in communication between humans and nature: for Giono, a consequence of the careless use that humans have always made of the world. Giono sees such a division as unnatural, as a disruption in a pattern of perpetual cyclical rhythms where all things should interrelate, or a corruption of the law of equilibrium which the universe attempts to maintain through a perpetual movement and tension between its elemental forces. In one of his essays, Giono defines his cosmic view thus: "la vie est un phénomène harmonique, une constante rupture d'équilibre, qui engendre un constant appétit d'équilibre".<sup>2</sup> The metaphysical dimension to his view of the universe, reminds us that it is not only the physical laws which govern these drives, but that there is an immaterial world which corresponds in every way to the material; that there are, for him, forces which surpass human understanding and reason. Dominique Grosse sums up Giono's approach in this way:

"Amalgame de croyances animistes et pantheistes, d'éléments mythologiques et de culture biblique, auxquels viennent se joindre des considérations personnelles, le surnaturel gionien est constitué de façon originale."<sup>3</sup>

As we have established, this sense of the supernatural finds expression through the interior world formed within the human mind: the realm of the imagination. At the beginning of this study we noted that all of Giono's dramas are, in essence, dramas relating to the tension found within the human condition: the existential struggle between reality and the

<sup>1</sup>First mentioned by Janet in *Colline*, it is clearly named and identified in the short story "La grande barrière" (from the collection *Solitude de la pitié*, I,521). In his early writings Giono often emphasises the need for the destruction of this barrier, yet from "Le Serpent d'étoiles", comes this statement, written by Giono the realist: "Elle sera toujours entre la bête et l'homme, cette haute barrière noire comme la nuit, haute jusqu'au soleil", in *Récits et essais*, p.134

<sup>2</sup>"Le Poids du ciel", in *Récits et essais*, p.454

<sup>3</sup> Dominique Grosse, *Jean Giono : Violence et Création*, p.41

dream, a result of humankind, in its undeniable uniqueness, needing to find a place of harmony with the rest of the world. We have seen (especially in the incorporation of human individuals into the countryside) that Giono's attempt at a resolution to the situation is to absorb, blend and mix all the elements of life together in a ceaseless recreation of the universe, expressed through the poetic word – to establish the invented world of the *conteur*. In composing a representation of the communal life of his peasants, then, the author uses a combination of various elements of the everyday world around him to give an impression of rustic reality; but here again, as he did when designing the natural realm, he makes use of the picturesque to create what is essentially a poetic illusion.

### Community

Giono's peasants live in a self-contained, timeless world, unconcerned about life elsewhere. They survive in small social clusters, or in isolated family groups, or as individuals separated from society. But the need for attachment at some level, for some sort of communal aspect to life or at the very least for a family home, is very apparent in the trilogy and identifies an important facet of their paradoxical position in the Gionian world. The ever-present tension between the essential solitude of humans and their need for relationship and companionship, is another aspect of humanity's great struggle for meaning within the vastness of the cosmos. Essentially, the internalisation of the perceived world, the subjectivity of the creative human viewpoint, gives rise to difficulties in making ourselves understood by one another. The solitude of the individual in these works is another strong component of reality as it opposes itself to the desire for cosmic unity.

Yet, at some level the hunger for unity is found within every heart in the Gionian universe. All the animals, all the birds, all the creatures of the woods and the night seek their own kind, as Odrignano will tell the young Jean of *Jean le bleu*.

“Tout se cherche. Tout s'appelle. [...] Souviens-toi, tout le bonheur des hommes est dans de petites vallées. Bien petites ; il faut que d'un bord à l'autre on puisse s'appeler.”  
(II,176/7)

Taken at its most basic form, in the primitive community of the Bastides the need for others is already evident. Even the mute, animal-like Gagou, although his makeshift dwelling remains on the edge of the Bastides caught between the world of Pan and that of humans, was given “la soupe et la paille” (130) when he arrived from nowhere one summer evening. Itinerants like Amédée in *Un de Baumugnes*, will sometimes attach themselves to a small community or family as Amédée reflects that Saturnin may have done: “Ce valet à l'ancienne

mode, peut-être un rouleur comme moi, qui avait, à la fin, trouvé sa place, il était de la famille, plus que s'il en avait eu le sang et la chair." (I,256) In *Regain* it is the drive towards relationship that makes up the whole thrust of the action.

The need for community has another function which, although realistic and practical on one level, is also strongly linked to the primeval imagination and to the world of legend. A feeling of the inexorable unfolding of destiny is common to all the stories of the PAN cycle. In isolated and primitive communities humans placed opposite a faceless universe are constantly aware of their own powerlessness to alter events. *Colline* speaks of "le vent du destin" (I, 215). In *Un de Baumugnes* Amedée tells us : "Et pourtant, cette histoire-là, c'était une chose écrite" (I,306). In *Regain* the narrator observes "Il semble qu'on est toujours désigné pour quelque chose." (I,347). In order to stand against the worst that fate can bring in the reality of the human situation, fraternisation is necessary for support and solidarity is essential for sheer physical survival.

The psychological makeup of the peasants of les Bastides is not complex, and with the exception of the two protagonists (and Gagou) they are often almost treated as a single entity. Giono, in conversation with Amrouche, calls his primitive characters in *Colline* "personnages à deux dimensions, sans profondeur."<sup>1</sup> They lead uncomplicated lives, initially with the mutual support and conviviality that is of fundamental importance to the simple cultural traditions of the village and to its very survival. But baser instincts, a lack of flexibility, selfishness and superstitious fear, will lead to a sort of collective delirium which will divide the usually tight-knit community. This mix of hospitality and hostility mirrors the moods of Nature, which can turn from orgiastic to malevolent. The precariousness of man's situation in the face of natural disasters is underlined by the presence of the "cadavre poussiéreux" (I,166) of the village in the hills, devastated by cholera years before. "Il y en a comme ça cinq, sous Lure." (I,166). As the diverse elements of Nature are seen to be combining into one force to wage war on humans, it seems to be essential that the inhabitants of the Bastides reunite against the menace of fire in order to defeat it.

In *Un de Baumugnes* conflict within the community again arises from primeval feelings of insecurity. In this instance, the uncomplicated purity of one individual's love must battle with common social convention. The small community of the Douloire is more established

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<sup>1</sup> *Entretiens avec Jean Amrouche et Taos Amrouche*, p. 145

and civilised than the hamlet of Bastides Blanches, but the disaster befalling it is caused through fear and shame. The community turns in on itself in bitterness, becoming locked away from contact with others and – the most damaging aspect – shutting off from communion with the natural world, so that the new human life contained within the stone walls remains hidden away, instead of being celebrated.

In sharp contrast to the mores of this repressive society are those of Albin's community in the mountains, an ideal born from the poetic imagination which desires to reinvent a better world. This fictional realm of Baumugnes moves us into an area of the "au-delà" beyond even the domain of Pan; so high, clear and clean-edged that it purifies those who inhabit it. The community comprises a body of people who have been shaped by the very land that contains them:

"Baumugnes, c'était un endroit où on avait refoulé des hommes hors de la société. On les avait chassés; ils étaient redevenus sauvages avec pureté et la simplicité des bêtes."  
(I,309)

Instead of the ignorant fear, carnality and selfishness of those who dwell on a lower level, Giono imagines and portrays the uncomplicated simplicity of lives through which he can create a utopia. He has Amédée reflect on these people:

"Ils étaient sains, ils étaient justes.... Ils venaient au-devant de la vie comme des enfants, les mains en avant, avec des gestes qui ne tombaient pas d'aplomb." (I,309)

The notion of a land where people have evolved morally as their society has devolved materially is, as we have already pointed out, purely fictional. Giono suggests with his "comme des enfants" that the nearest we come to it in reality is through a process of imaginative withdrawal from the pressure and commerce of the adult world whereby one can re-enter the Eden of the child (or at least the nurtured child, as Giono himself was), where "cet œil pur des enfants"<sup>1</sup> is to be found: the enchanted perspective which is reality for the protected small child, as yet uncorrupted by the world.

Yet, even putting aside the utopia born of pure poetic fantasy, in these pre-WWII novels a measure of hope for humankind always remains. Although carrying deep emotional scars from the Great War, at this stage of his life Giono still holds onto the possibility of humans eventually educating themselves in the ways of a natural communion with one another and an awareness of the majesty of the living world around them. Sylvie Vignes says of this attitude

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<sup>1</sup>"Manosque des-plateaux", *Récits et essais*, p17

of persistent optimism: “On a un peu l’impression que pour le jeune Giono, la guerre de 14 est une épouvantable aberration qu’il faut à tout prix éviter de renouveler mais que, accident improbable, fruit de la folie militariste de certains, elle ne remet pas vraiment en cause la nature humaine en elle-même.”<sup>1</sup> Fascination with the possibility of a harmonious existence leads Giono to continue to experiment with the idea in fiction and his later establishment of a commune in the mountains, at the Contadour, will be in some ways an attempt to implement such a society in real life. This hope also accounts for the didactic writing in most of his essays and for the oddity of the parenthetical chapter of social ideas found in the middle of *Que ma joie demeure*, comprising an extended, almost purely political conversation between Bobi and the farmer. Humankind’s unique needs must be acknowledged, but humans can learn to live in tune with the natural world and with one another. For the process to get underway, individuals must first catch the fire and the poet’s word can be the light which ignites the torch by which the flame is passed from one to another, just as the dream proliferated in *Naissance de l’Odyssée*.

With *Regain*, the author lays down the foundation which prepares for the endeavour to make the dream reality. Until they form a couple, both Panturle and Arsule live on the margins of society. The effect of Panturle’s total isolation is vividly described, and he himself admits its effects to Arsule: “Quand on est seul, on est méchant; on le devient.” (I,378) Similarly, the rejection suffered by Arsule has turned her into little more than a beast of burden. Each of these characters is symbolically purified by the elements, before they come together to create a new society. The message seems to be clear and deliberately simple – it is necessary to begin again from the start and to construct a simple yet specifically human order which works in concert with the natural one.

Giono moves systematically through the process of reinventing the evolution of civilisation. He commences by having the land revert to a wilderness and by wiping out the inhabitants of this future Eden except for one. This “first man” is given a “first woman”. Order begins in the domestic realm with Arsule’s influence in the house, extends to the immediate surrounding area outside, and then to the fields beyond. Panturle learns to channel his natural instincts towards productive ends. Once systems are in place that allow humans and nature to work together, other inhabitants move into the village and the roots of community and co-operation are laid down. Yet the constraints imposed by the physical

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<sup>1</sup> Sylvie Vignes, *Giono et le travail des sens*, p.18

aspects of the countryside will always limit the size of the community which will remain no more than a small village. An overt note of didacticism, the cautionary tale of the educated man who ruins his farm with scientific innovations (the prosaic), ensures that the reader understands that the methods of cultivation in use in this community, will remain those of the artisan. Skill, imagination and the “secret” knowledge which traditionally passes from one generation to the next (the poetic), will create bounty from the most basic technology. It remains for the reader to await the advent of *Que ma joie demeure* to learn of the outcome of the exercise.

### Oral communication

We have established the importance of the spoken word in the trilogy by reference to the spontaneous oral quality of the stories, to the narrative style and to Giono’s constant association of speech with the natural elements, in particular water. The manner of expression found among the peasants of the early novels is also the most important indicator of custom (whether real or invented by the author) as well as of interpersonal relationships among the characters. Above all, it is revelatory of the author’s fictionalisation of his everyday world and therefore it justifies the inclusion in this chapter of a brief breakdown of the methods of oral communication that the writer employs. It would require the skills of a linguist with some considerable familiarity with the local speech to analyse its elements with detailed accuracy, but by borrowing from the writing of a few scholars who have the requisite skills, we can usefully put together a short summary of what appear to be the basic elements of the spoken language used by Giono’s peasants.

When examining the use of direct speech in the works of the PAN cycle, it is immediately apparent that these early novels are full of expressions and descriptive items of vocabulary which seem to have been borrowed from the local dialect, with some idioms and words presenting features specific to the Provençal area. Yet although the use of vocabulary, syntax and formulas imported from the local language reinforces the general effect of authenticity, Giono has not faithfully reproduced the natural peasant speech of the region. In an article on the language in *Colline*, Jean Molino writes: “Giono construit un langage paysan à partir d’un modèle externe, d’origine littéraire, le style marotique<sup>1</sup>, [or *style naïf*] qui lui sert de cadre et d’hypothèse générale sur ce qu’est un langage paysan ; ce cadre est nourri

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<sup>1</sup>The *Marotique* style is defined by Marmontel, so Molino tells us, as having three main traits – the maintenance of archaic constructions; a suppression of the article; the inversion and use of an archaic vocabulary, no longer in general use. Jean Molino, “Décrire, Écrire, Conter” : a propos de « Colline », in *Giono aujourd’hui*, p.72

d'éléments empruntés au français de Manosque [...] mais ce n'est pas la langue réelle qui lui sert de modèle ”<sup>1</sup>. Giono builds, says Molino, a language which is not an authentic peasant language, but one which reflects the essential elements of the peasant soul – its immediacy and simplicity. Very briefly, the main points that Molino identifies<sup>2</sup> as the characteristics which define Giono's version of the *naïve* style are:

1. The use of popular items of vocabulary and “slangy” colloquialisms which give a peasant “colour” to the speech but which are not necessarily peasant in origin. Egs. *putain*, *rigolo*, *mômerie*.
2. The use of unusual and carefully chosen vocabulary items selected for their descriptive value or naivety. Molino identifies, above all, the strange use of diminutives in a completely artificial manner, seeing this as proof that Giono is more concerned with the idea of conveying simplicity and naivety than with any linguistic accuracy.
3. The systematic employment of “présentatifs” (for example when Gondran speaks to the doctor about his father-in-law : “*C'est le beau-père. Ça lui a pris l'autre nuit.*” (Colline, 133) ) giving a flavour of simplicity to the discourse; the reactions of a peasant lost in the immediacy of the present.
4. Paratactic phrases, where simple phrases are often juxtaposed with no attempt at logical linkage.
5. Noun phrases which generally concern a reprise, or a response which is simply juxtaposed with the end of the preceding phrase and which sometimes emphasises the passage to a new paragraph. Eg. “...et j'ai vu que c'était un *chat*. // Un *chat* tout noir.” (Colline, p151).

Such expressions, then, are extensions of an idea; their use is concerned with style, rather than with the conveyance of any particular content or meaning. The purpose and the effect of this rather extreme stylisation is to play with the fictional aspect of the created worlds of the novels. It is, thus, quite openly a language of poetic invention which belongs to the interior world of the artist, rather than to any external reality. Giono produces a language which from a local point of view, according to Maurice Chevaly, a native of Manosque, has “ tous les charmes de l'exotisme ”, through managing to be “à la fois familier à nos oreilles et incompréhensible à notre entendement.”<sup>3</sup> Yet Georges Ricard<sup>1</sup> makes the point that the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp.72-73

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Chevaly, *Giono Vivant*, p.50. Not all locals found this *patois* “charming”; Chevaly also gives this amusing anecdote : “Je demandai à une paysanne manosquine, grande liseuse devant l'Eternel, pourquoi elle tenait Giono en abomination. Elle me répondit, et elle n'était certainement pas la seule à le penser : ‘ Parce qu'il nous a ridiculisés. Nous ne parlons pas comme ça, voyons ! ’ ” p.55



author's borrowing from the local linguistic substratum, in both his direct speech forms and in the indirect recitation, rarely poses any problems of comprehension among his readers. Giono's work is essentially poetic and therefore retains its universal character; the borrowings merely enrich and complement his expression.

It is the social aspect of language which is particularly revealing when we consider the dialogues which take place among the communities of humans which are always found at the hub of the Gionian universe. Dominique Brunel<sup>2</sup> has made a study of the social aspects of language in the trilogy, in particular its phatic function – *phatic* is used here in the sense that Malinowski<sup>3</sup> intended, to include all social situations where human relations are sustained by words spoken for that purpose alone, rather than for any other practical reason. The social situation itself is created through an exchange of banal words even if there is nothing of any importance to communicate. It is initiated through the gregarious instinct for conviviality and any forging of links, or communication of feelings, results from what is happening linguistically. Brunel examines the dialogue of the characters and comes up with two main points: 1. “Le langage, dans la trilogie, est un mode d'action économique, sociale et culturelle.” 2. “Il représente souvent un moyen de fraterniser à travers l'expérience intuitive d'une communauté de destin.”<sup>4</sup>

When used in the manner of the first of these points, Brunel finds the peasant dialogues to be concise and efficacious, closely linked to the action and founded on basic needs and daily habits. Possibly, he suggests, speech is limited because time and energy must be organised around the essential tasks of living. In the “Notice” which accompanies *Regain* (1999), Luce Ricatte comments on the fact that the dialogues of the novel are striking in their rapidity and strength, and notes that Giono himself describes them as typical of the short, sharp phrases of people who are used to being in solitary situations. When dialogue is no longer attached to a precise action, its natural and primitive social function, in the manner that Malinowski has defined, is often used in a particular way. Most strikingly it is in situations of awkwardness or mystery or even danger that phatic communion occurs. It is used, for example, to break a silence which has become too heavy, or to momentarily establish lines of sympathy through which the characters can dispel discomfort or fear in an

<sup>1</sup> Georges Ricard, “Langue provençale, provençalismes et français régional dans l'œuvre de Giono”, *Bulletin No.33, 1990*, p.76

<sup>2</sup> Dominique Brunel, “Le langage dans la trilogie de Pan”, *Bulletin No. 33, 1990*.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., a reference to Bronislaw Malinowski is given on p.98

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 81-99

unusual or threatening situation. Brunel cites among other examples, the situation in *Regain* where Gédemus and Arsule are disoriented on the stark expanse of the empty, windswept, plateau and Arsule has from time to time glimpsed something unreal (Mamèche) that both characters feel to be threatening:

“« Ça va? » a demandé Gédemus.

« Oui », a dit Arsule.

Après ça, il y a eu un long moment de calme. Ça leur avait fait du bien de dire deux mots. Puis, à force de durer, ce calme a été bien plus désagréable que le reste et ils sont remis à parler [...].

Il n’y avait toujours rien à écouter. Rien que le Gédemus. Il avait l’air de se soulager en parlant. Arsule écoutait les mots mais, autour des mots, elle écoutait le silence.” (I,358,9)

Here Brunel also identifies a suggestion of the insufficiency of language as a tool to help humans to convey meaning in certain situations; a theme which Giono will raise more directly and expand upon in *Le Chant du monde* and in *Que ma joie demeure*.

In *Colline*, it is in order to dissipate the tension provoked by the strange recital of Janet that the men unite around a table to partake of a bottle of absinthe together. While such a gathering is probably also a matter of custom in the village, Brunel points out that the verbal exchange which takes place has the end purpose of recreating an atmosphere of sociability, of restoring unity between the group and some mastery over the situation.

Despite acknowledging the insufficiency of words at times, Giono is always a promoter of their powerful influence. Brunel identifies another purpose of pure phatic expression in Giono’s reported conversations – the use of a short, meaningless, phrase to act as a signal of the importance of the statement which follows. The author draws the attention of the listener (and reader) to the significance of what comes next, by the use of formulas such as “il faut le dire; je vais te dire; je te dis que;”etc.

There are, as well, examples to be found in the trilogy of the type of ordinary phatic dialogue, common to everyday situations. One such, is the conversation which occurs between Jaume and Gondran, close to the end of *Colline*, where normality is returning to the Bastides and relationships are being restored. The two men are seated on the margin of the fountain in the twilight sharing a bottle of absinthe:

“« Elle est bonne notre eau. »

L'ombre de Lure couvre la moitié de la terre. Des maisons vient un bruit de vaisselle et le chant d'une berceuse d'enfant.

« Aphrodis envoie la petite à Pertuis, chez sa grand-mère, pour lui faire changer d'air.

--- Ça a l'air de mieux aller.

--- Oui, comme le reste.

--- Ah ! tu sais, nous gardons le chat. Il est des Grandes Bastides. Tu te souviens, quand Chabassut m'a apporté une charretée de foin ? Il était couché dedans, paraît ; c'est son chat. L'est bien brave. C'est une bonne bestiole; elle attrape les rats, faut voir ça.

--- Tu commences pas encore à labourer, Alexandre ?

--- Demain. »” (I, 217)

The following four points briefly summarise the basic elements of such conversations:

(a) It takes some time (and is of no importance) for the reader to establish which of the characters has begun the conversation and which of them replies, because the remarks are, in the most part, interchangeable.

(b) Simple bridges are established between characters; this can involve a character not necessarily registering or understanding exactly what has been said to him/her before continuing with a contribution to the discourse.

(c) Each patiently takes a turn as listener and then speaker, as if participating in a ritual. The simple social codes that the characters follow have their roots in the culture of the society – *c'est de règle* (I,222) – and many of the verbal exchanges are accompanied by amicable gestures and offers of hospitality.

(d) Such exchanges involve general considerations rather than attempting to make any particular point.

In conclusion, it appears that it is the management of daily life, the “rubbing along together” in a small isolated community, that is the basic purpose of these exchanges and that also makes up their subject matter. They play an essential role in establishing the background to the story because the way of life that they convey to the reader creates the special atmosphere necessary for the unfolding of the action; a sense of the eternal circular movement of time in an unchanging universe. The characters that give voice to them are concerned only with the minutiae of the business of being in the world and with developing the skills of the essential art of existing. The impression gained is one of universality – that

throughout time, similar exchanges have taken place and will take place, between ordinary people, in ordinary situations, everywhere.

## Children of Pan

But Giono's apparently ordinary peasant folk are sometimes very extraordinary. In each community there are one or two individuals who stand out from the crowd because they present in some way a contradiction to the generally prevailing attitudes, or they initiate some form of disruption in the everyday run of events. Almost invariably, such individuals are acquainted with solitude. As well, many of them are travellers or wanderers who enter from the outside to bring some form of revelation and become a catalyst for change. In the novels of the first manner that we are discussing, Ulysses returns from many years of wandering afar; Janet has moved up from the lowlands, chased out from where he was not wanted; Albin and Amédée are itinerant workers who come from separate places to La Douloire; Mamèche ranges beyond the village in order to find Arsule who after years of lonely wandering brings new life to Aubignane; the "loners", Antonio and Matelot, cause disruption as they move into the land of Rebeillard in *Le Chant du monde* and in *Que ma joie demeure*, Bobi comes from nowhere to turn the community of the Grémone plateau upside down.

These human catalysts often have, to one degree or another, a polarising effect on the community through the response that they arouse among its members. There is a division among humans which begins to establish itself in the early novels: one which will persist in the works of Giono under various more developed forms, but which essentially remains a division between those who are compelled to use their senses and their imagination to become aware of and involved with the animated world existing both outside of and within themselves, and those who settle for "le sort commun". This division is more dramatic than a recognition of the general perceptiveness and sensitivity of some characters when compared with the unresponsiveness of others. From the start it is concerned with a passion for living, and is a matter of Giono separating out what could be called, to use extreme terms, the "sentient" characters from the "insensible". These words, selected from the Bloomsbury Thesaurus, would seem to be the most suitable for the purposes of definition – portraying not only the respective sensorial and cognitive abilities of the characters, but also their degree of openness to the influence of the world around them. *Sentient* because it falls between *perceptive* and *feeling*; *insensible* because it falls between *insensitive* and *unsusceptible*.<sup>1</sup> The division between the two types of character mirrors the rift between humans and the natural world, because in the early novels Giono so closely associates the two.

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<sup>1</sup> Bloomsbury Thesaurus (1993), p.800

In *Naissance de l'Odyssée* this opposition was suggested in the psychological form of a division between the dreamer and the materialist, or on a literary level, between the poetic and the prosaic. As a fearful, common man of superstition and a dreamer, the character of Ulysses embodied both of these until he reinvented himself to become a hero in his own eyes and in the eyes of others and a catalyst for change through the strength of his imagination, conveyed in the power of the poetic word or the creative lie. Opposition from the world of reality came not from the crowd, but from amongst those closest to him. His son, Telemachus, embodied the narrowness of the daily routine, representing the call of conformity and duty that would attempt to anchor Ulysses in reality and condemn him to a process of existence equivalent to a slow death.

In the PAN cycle, where humans are directly and bodily engaged with the world, these concepts are expressed in more everyday, concrete terms. The emphasis now falls more directly on the vehicle of the senses through which the life force from the outside world is imparted to the imaginative mind. Prominent among the important characters in Giono's earliest novels are those who provide the first examples of "sentient" humans and who could be described at this stage as "children of Pan." Their distinguishing characteristic is an ability, to one degree or another, to use their physical bodies as if they were employing an instrument to penetrate and interpret the world. For those who are gifted with this capacity, their extreme sensuality offers a way of escape from the uncertainties of existence within the natural world, through a total abandonment to its power.

Contact with the great forces of nature, therefore, can be seen as the mark of an exceptional being, of which Gagou is a sort of ultra-primitive prototype. A necessary condition for entering into such contact, is to have remained untainted by the artifice of civilisation and attuned to the rhythms of the surrounding world. While it is through Nature that the elemental forces are directly manifested, sentient humans are gifted with the capacity to interpret such forces through the senses mingled with the imagination. It is the receptiveness and respondent creativity of these gifted individuals, based on selected local peasants and artisans and incorporating aspects of the author himself, that allow them to act as a channel in this way, and to their ranks we must add all the seers, sorcerers and healers of Giono's work. The resulting forms of creative expression (which can range from the practical gift of causing the land to be fruitful, or fashioning something of beauty or usefulness with the hands, to expressing oneself through music or the poetic word), seem to channel the mysteries of the cosmos into a form which makes them available to all humanity.

Yet in the very first novels, sensitivity to the forces of nature is not always presented in a positive manner because nature itself is both malevolent or benevolent according to its whim, and in the first two tales terror dominates above the beauty of the wilderness. Giono's early elemental forces are passionate, powerful and unpredictable: "Voilà Pan. Le grelottement de son cœur s'en est allé sous la peau des hommes et, à la cadence de leur sang, il tinte poésie ou folie." (I,773)<sup>1</sup> In *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, Archais has been driven mad by the violent cosmic forces which manifest to him as the gods, yet the poetry of his words transports others to new worlds. In *Colline*, Janet is often delirious, and always malevolent; but he does have an instinctive, intense and intimate relationship with the natural elements which endow him with his mysterious shaman-like powers. He controls the villagers through a fear generated by the mystery of the unknown. For those who come under his spell (as the audiences of Ulysses can bear witness), the power of the story-teller to influence the thoughts of others is considerable and there is a suggestion here that it can also be dangerous.

However, as there was with Archias, there is also a positive aspect to Janet's influence. The asperity of his language works to destroy all complacency among his listeners, through what is, effectively, the use of shock tactics. An example of the long-term modifying effect of Janet's verbal inventions on the behaviour of others can be found in the passage where Gondran works in his olive grove on the slopes. Seen from a nearby summit, this patch of land looks to the eye of the storyteller like a scar on the landscape, where cultivation has "raclé la peau". (I,145) When Gondran startles a lizard on this land and it rears and spits in surprise he reacts in turn with brute instinct, smashing at this challenger with his spade because "il veut être la bête maîtresse; celle qui tue." (I,146) Suddenly, he feels ashamed. Giono increases the sense of shame by an action which emphasises the huge imbalance in the size and strength of the two creatures – Gondran buries his crime by pushing dirt over the still-twitching corpse with his foot. Then :

"Sans savoir pourquoi, Gondran est mal à l'aise; [...] il est inquiet et cette inquiétude est dans sa gorge comme une pierre.

Il tourne le dos à un grand buisson de sureau, de chèvrefeuille, de clématite, de figuiers emmêlés qui gronde et gesticule plus fort que le reste du bois.

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<sup>1</sup>From "Présentation de Pan".

Pour le première fois, il pense, tout en bêchant, que sous ces écorces monte un sang pareil à son sang à lui ; qu'une énergie farouche tord ces branches et lance ces jets d'herbe dans le ciel.

Il pense aussi à Janet. Pourquoi ?

Il pense à Janet, et il cligne de l'œil vers le petit tas de terre brune qui palpite sur le lézard écrasé." (I,147)

Gondran has undergone a form of imaginative awakening. He has become aware of the possibility of the planet as a living being, and aware of the violations that he has committed against it:

Il se redresse ; appuyé sur le manche de l'outil il regarde la grande terre couverte de cicatrices et de blessures. (I,148)

In *Colline*, Giono employs Jaume, a materialist and practical thinker, as the natural leader of the community to finally stand in opposition to the imaginative excesses of Janet. His attitude is established early. On the second page, the voluptuous enjoyment to be experienced by living through the senses is expressed through the wild *sanglier* which invades man's domain, to wallow in the spring. Jaume enters the tale, as the first human character, by scaring off the beast with a shot from his rifle. From his pragmatic perspective the persistent intrusion by a creature from the wild onto territory won by human industry and retained only by cultivation and careful vigilance is a violation of the natural order, not an affirmation of it, and so elicits this declaration of war. The rifle wielded by Jaume is on a symbolic level akin to the "épieu en bois de platane" that Telemachus sharpens to use against Ulysses at the end of *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, in an attempt to destroy the dream. The battle lines are clearly drawn. Near the end of *Colline* Jaume will plot with the other men to kill Janet, having identified him as an enemy. "Ah! Janet, je la connais maintenant ta méchantise. Elle est toute droite devant moi comme une montagne. T'es de l'autre côté de la barricade, avec la terre, les arbres, les bêtes, contre nous." (I,189)

The symbolism of the rifle employed in the defence of reality, is extended to a number of everyday tools made of steel which are often wielded by the peasants as if they were weapons in a war against the natural forces. Three of these instruments are associated with violent action and blood: Gondran's spade kills a lizard and also a toad in Janet's story, Jaume's rifle wounds the boar at the end of the novel and the bill-hook is used to dispatch it. Tools are also used as weapons to beat back the beast of fire. This stands in sharp contrast to the use of tools once they are employed by those characters whom we recognise as "children of Pan" –



like the plough in *Regain*, the blade of which is also made of steel but which is used to uphold the dream. It is regarded as a tool of beauty, carefully fashioned, with the assistance of Panturle, by the practised skill and inherited knowledge of the old blacksmith. Like the hammer of the blacksmith, all the tools used by humans are mere extensions of a body which is governed by a heart. The plough manages to tame the land only because it is a tool of “integrity” used with honest labour and positive intent.

If Janet embodies a malevolent side to Pan, by the time we arrive at *Un de Baumugnes* Pan is in a gentler mood and Albin, as the hero, incarnates this benevolence. He is equally instinctive and totally integrated with the living world of his birth, but with a sensuality which remains natural and pure and which endorses his creativity. Albin represents an ideal in the early Gionian universe, resolving the ever present tension between nature and culture, reality and the dream. His love for Angèle is uncomplicated, unselfish, and devoid of any manipulation. He uses his knowledge of the invisible and the demiurgic powers that he employs through music, positively, to heal. We are again reminded that with the gift of artistry comes a measure of responsibility.

In *Regain* Pan still smiles upon his “children”, eventually facilitating a meeting for Panturle with the woman who redeems him from his animal-like state. In this novel, even more than in *Colline*, the constant rhythm of the seasons and the interdependence of all life, even of all things, is stressed. But it is an interesting and important point to note that, initially, Panturle embodies the total sensualist, and that such an extreme form of sensuality is presented in a negative light. The effects of a totally isolated and primitive lifestyle remove all creative ability from him and so reduce him to the status of an animal. This is not the purity and simplicity of a beast that is the mien of those from the ideal community of the Baumugnes; Panturle’s gestures become those of the wild boar that was set in direct opposition to the humans in *Colline*: “Il renifle un grand reniflement qui est celui des sangliers surpris, un avalement d’air qui siffle dans sa narine large ouverte.” (I,370/1) These baser animal-like instincts, which Giono seems to suggest lie close to the surface in all humans ready to surface when opportunities for relationship, fulfilment and creative challenge are extinguished, are most evident in the passage where Panturle guts and skins a fox. The fragment provides more than a suggestion of the manner of the *divertissement* which the character of M.V. will employ to lighten his well-regulated and tedious life in *Un roi sans divertissement*.

“Il fouille dans le renard comme dans une poche. Ça, lourd et juteux comme un fruit mûr et qu’il écrase, ça sent l’amer, ça sent l’aubépine. C’est le foie. Du fiel vert gicle sur son pouce...”(I,369)

Throughout the first half of *Regain*, Panturle becomes progressively more violent and lustful, a process which is reversed in the second half of the novel when he can enjoy the companionship and influence of Arsule. This is a clear acknowledgement from Giono that, in reality, the great barrier can never be crossed if humans are to retain their basic humanity. While living off the land as a lonely hunter-gatherer, Panturle’s knowledge of his environment is complex and complete. He knows how to read the traces of something written “dans l’air et dans la terre”(I,371). Yet despite this integration with his surroundings he must struggle to survive, to win the right to exist, and above all the right to find a mate and to procreate. Paradoxically, it is only once he has marked out, tamed and cultivated a domain for himself and Arsule – in other words once he has set aside a specific area favourable to human habitation and joined his life with another of his own kind – that assimilation with the environment is so complete that he, himself, becomes a metaphor for the land.

In concluding this look at the “children of Pan”, we need to return again to the importance of human dialogue. We have examined how speech, for Janet, is the source of his power; but it is essentially a destructive power. The human voice has a totally different aspect in *Un de Baumugnes*. Like the clarity of his countenance, Albin’s voice – “grave, profond, de long souffle et de même verte force que le vent” (I,237) – reveals his nature. But Albin is the descendant of a tribe whose original founders had lost their tongues, from “la montagne des muets; le pays où on ne parle pas comme les hommes.” (I,228) In this realm of “l’au-delà”, the inhabitants developed, over time, a potent substitute for speech through the voice of the harmonica. As a descendant of these people, it is music that holds for Albin the same power over others as language has for Janet – but here the force is positive, not destructive, signifying purity and honesty. Unlike the human tongue, music cannot lie. The creative, or more exactly poetic, lie which Giono promotes because it brings enchantment to the world and healing to the soul, is clearly differentiated from the destructive lie which aims at deceiving others for the purpose of exploitation and selfish gain.

It is in *Regain*, that human speech begins to take on the positive and important aspect that it will have for Giono’s various *personæ* in the work to come. Panturle, in his extreme isolation, is reduced to a state where he can only “parle[r] seul” (I,330). And later, when he

deteriorates to become more and more animal-like, there is a point at which he no longer speaks at all: “Il est devenu plus méchant aussi. Il ne parle plus à ses ustensiles.” (I,342) On first seeing Arsule, he tracks her through the forest, as if hunting down an animal:

“Il ne sait pas parler avec des paroles d’homme pour cette chose-là. Il est trop plein de cette bouillante force, il a besoin du geste des bêtes.” (I,371)

Yet, by the end of the book Panturle can speak from the heart to Arsule, “« On a bien du contentement ensemble . »” (I,428) His head is no longer swept empty by the wind. In other words, he is no longer a creature of pure instinct. A further point of progression – the images which now fill his head are not just those which belong to the present moment, but are also images of the future, and his desire is to express them through words. “ Il a des chansons qui sont là, entassées dans sa gorge à presser ses dents.” (I,428) The songs which rise within him, seeking expression, indicate that having established the ideal community, with peace and security, there will soon be the need for more. The next step in civilisation is an expansion of human horizons through imaginative flight. There is already the need for the imaginative world which will dispel any chance of *ennui*. Panturle is beginning to dream.

**Conclusion:** The simplicity of these three short novels, with their air of spontaneity, resembles the traditional style of oral story-telling found within the region of their setting and reflects some of the universality of all folk tales that contain elements of didacticism and involve a direct engagement with the basic problems of living. Giono uses the mythic quality of such tales as a format through which to identify and augment the tension present within the nature/civilisation opposition of the universe. This tension is reflected on a societal level by an individual/community opposition. It is symbolised by the brooding presence of an unseen, ubiquitous god-force, Pan, hidden orchestrator of the creative/destructive power which is found in the diverse moods of nature and which is mirrored within the human mind by the confident drive towards exploration and creation and the inhibitive fears generated by the primeval imagination.

Giono strives to resolve this tension through the creation and maintenance of a state of universal equilibrium and attempts to achieve such homeostasis in two main ways:

1. *Working through imagery*, he effects a deliberate deconstruction of reality through discrepancies, idiosyncracies and odd juxtapositions in his narration, while the physical components of apparent reality are broken, bent or transformed through simile or metaphor into some other entity before being incorporated into a universal mix. The deconstructive process is accompanied by a simultaneous process of reconstruction – at the same time as the

known world is being demolished, another is taking its place. The elements take on the properties of living creatures, while humans become bodily absorbed into a landscape which they are at the same time internalising into their individual, subjective imaginations.

2. *Working through community*, the author establishes simple peasant collectives, built through the apparent, but illusory, ordinariness of local dialogue and custom. The breakdown of this “normalcy” comes through some external catalyst which disrupts the everyday equilibrium and reveals the vulnerability of humankind’s position in the cosmos. An escalation in the drama of the situation paves the way for an ultimate resolution of the nature/civilisation conflict, and of interpersonal conflicts, through the influence of the poet (or his/her various avatars) equipped with a power – that of the poetic force – which is strong enough to be regarded by Giono as an equal companion to the four elements.

But paradoxically, the process also reveals the very specificity of the human being – the need for humans to retain their individuality and unique gift of creativity and its expression. It also heightens the existence of a division amongst humans themselves; between those sympathetic characters, responsive to the rhythms of the world and therefore open to being moved by the power of the poetic force, and those who remain resistant to or unaware of it .

For the human race – victim of life’s terrors as well as participant in its joys, and in need of the stimulation of challenge – the goal is not to achieve just some sort of ongoing *modus vivendi* with the natural world. The author’s ideal is to arrive at a state of mutual respect and cooperation brought about by an awareness and celebration of the living heartbeat which unites all components of the cosmos – “le grand Tout”. But we understand that it is the conscious choice of poetic imagery and illusion alone that can sustain this imaginative dream against the stark reality of the human situation.

## Chapter Three – The world of the child

« Dans ses solitudes, dès qu'il est maître de ses rêveries, l'enfant connaît le bonheur de rêver qui sera plus tard le bonheur des poètes. » Gaston Bachelard<sup>1</sup>

**Introduction:** Notwithstanding the desire for cosmic unity that is revealed in Giono's early work through a constant use of analogy to display the interconnectedness of his invented universe, we have already noted that throughout the body of these novels the author makes a clear division among human beings between those who inhabit the world of *poiēsis* and those who select, or settle for, stark reality and the commonplace. This division can also be seen in terms of the opposition of two contrasting mind sets, which we will call respectively the "childlike" and the "adult." To be childlike, in Giono's terms, means to exist in a state of openness and generosity rather than in one of innocence. It is a question of attitude and values rather than a concern with chronological age. In the essay "Triomphe de la vie", we find:

“Il y a sous certains cheveux blancs ces yeux marins largement ventés dans lesquels roulent imperturbablement les plus belles aurores du monde. La jeunesse n'habite pas les muscles : elle habite l'âme.”<sup>2</sup>

The author defines his two groups very distinctly in his non-fictional work by separating out those characters who remain open and able to entertain all the mysteries of the universe, whatever their age, from the masses who on attaining adulthood cross an invisible social and psychological barrier and enter into the restrictive form of living which Giono sees as the sterile world of the unimaginative. Such a mundane way of life is strongly linked, in Giono's mind, to the form of material greed that gives rise to a proliferation of modern technology and mechanisation at the expense of the living world. In one of his essays ("Les Bruits"<sup>3</sup>) he goes as far as declaring that, paradoxically, those citizens of an urban environment whose childlike centre, or *cœur*, is constantly malnourished, can never be considered really adult, in the true sense of the word. Deprived of the noises, colours and odours of the natural world that will stimulate the senses and hence the mind, they will remain stunted to the point of being something less than completely human

<sup>1</sup>Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de la rêverie*, pp.84,85

<sup>2</sup>*Récits et essais*, p.661

<sup>3</sup>Giono, *Les terrasses de l'île d'Elbe*, pp.96-100

In his early fictional work, Giono wastes little effort on those guilty of insensibility: they are generally pitied and ignored, apart from their use from time to time as a foil for his sentient characters or as an object lesson for didactic purposes. In this chapter we begin by looking at early instances of what is, from the outset, the author's privileging of certain personalities in his creative writing. We will explore some of the childlike characteristics of a number of the protagonists of the PAN trilogy, before selectively examining other works which Giono uses to establish and promote the luxuriant images and passionate responses which define the world for those who see with the eyes of a child, and which help to establish the author's belief that spiritual regeneration is necessary for the improvement of all of humankind but is available only to those who open themselves to the rich influences of the living world. The author's portrayal of the childlike includes children themselves, and as these particular writings are all to some degree autobiographical in examining them we will also be exploring portraits of the semi-fictional young Giono – especially the one to be found in the early autobiographical novel *Jean le Bleu*, a character whose incorporation into the work of Giono can be pointed up by using a comparison with the later and more sophisticated incarnation found in the novel *Mort d'un personnage*. In making this comparison, the important thing for our purposes is that both these books contain a microcosm of the world according to Giono at two different stages of its development and both manifest the inner dream which forms the genesis of all his work. They are, in part, adventures in wonderland – the discovery of the features of a universe generated from the response of a sensitive, imaginative and somewhat timid only child, to the stimuli around him: a young poet's growing awareness of his place in the world and more especially of his own demiurgic gifts. Finally, through *Jean le Bleu* we can see the progression of the developing artist in embryo (the future agent of human healing and channel for the living creative forces), as he undergoes a cycle of development, loss and regeneration which is allied to the cyclical nature of the living world. The inchoate poet has an ecstatic awakening to his receptive powers, a steady period of growth and flowering which descends to wintry disillusionment in the face of the stark reality which accompanies the loss of childhood, and a rebirth on the threshold of adulthood through the discovery of the life-transforming force supplied by his growing ability to express the dream.

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As early in the PAN trilogy as *Colline*, we can find the very first suggestions of a championing of childlike attitudes through some of the aspects of Gagou. Described as “un simple” (I,130), Gagou is depicted as infantile in his unconstrained, instinctive sensuousness.

At night he emerges from his makeshift house (which suggests a play-hut, built amongst the ruined pillars) to dance in the moonlight:

“Le clair de lune l’emplit d’un tumulte léger : il se meut doucement, comme sur la pointe des herbes, presque sans bouger les pieds, sa hanche ondule, il titube, ivre de soir.” (I,165)

And later, when he discovers the fountain at the abandoned village and begins to slake his thirst, he is portrayed as a nursing infant :

“De ses bras étendus il embrasse la coupe du bassin débordant, il a collé sa bouche sur une faille de la margelle ; entre les gueulées il geint de plaisir comme un petit enfant qui tète.” (I,169)

This state of basic infantilism and primitivism does not appear to be regarded by the author in a negative manner, but rather is presented as a form of enlightenment which brings its own rewards. The men of the Bastides have unsuccessfully tried to restart their village fountain through attempting a similar process of suction:

“Gondran a embouché le canon de la fontaine. Le tuyau de fer emplît sa bouche; il tète de toutes ses forces pour venir l’eau.” (I,159),

but the water which sustains life, refuses to run for them. Gagou alone is able to locate a living spring, because only he has maintained a harmonious relationship with the mountain as a nurturing life force: “la mère des eaux, la montagne qui garde l’eau dans les ténèbres de sa chair poreuse.” (I,167) The strength of this association is reinforced by the imagery employed by the author when the parched men from the village follow Gagou at night to the foot of the mountain. The promise of water, held within the great body which looms above them, colours their vision and reinforces an integration of Gagou with the landscape:

“Au fond de l’air tremble la flûte d’une source ; dans les herbes, une grande roche plate miroite comme un œil d’eau. La lumière de la lune coule des hauteurs du ciel, jaillit en poussière blanche et l’ombre de Gagou nage sous elle comme un poisson.” (I,168)

Gagou is the simplest and most primitive of all of Giono’s “seers”. His communion with nature sets him apart as one whom nature protects, while at the same time it unites its forces against the other inhabitants of the Bastides. On the psychological level, Gagou’s instinctive behaviour immunises him against the superstitious fear that grips the community. His reaction before the full force of the fire which bears down on the village is one of childlike innocence, where his natural fear turns to wonderment. The blaze advances, “ses muscles roux se tordent; sa grande haleine creuse un trou brûlant dans le ciel. Sous ses pieds on entend craquer les os de la garrigue”.(I,197) and through the eyes of Gagou, we watch as this

monster becomes a thing of beauty. His simple delight in the surrounding splendour carries him forward into another world. Sensuous abandon does not lead to disaster, but to fulfilment. Instead of being consumed, he appears to pass through a barrier and into "l'au-delà":

"Il a couru en désarroi dans la fumée. Il bramait, il avait peur ; et, tout d'un coup, émerveillé, il s'est immobilisé tout tremblant de joie. Un long fil de bave suinte de ses lèvres.

L'épais rideau s'est déchiré. Devant lui dix genévriers brûlent ensemble. C'est vite fini, la flamme saute, mais c'est, maintenant, comme dix candélabres d'or qui scintillent. Toutes les branches sont des braises, les branchillons aussi, les minces réseaux de bois, aussi. [...]

« Ga,gou... »

Il s'approche, tend la main et, malgré l'étau de feu qui broie ses pieds, il entre dans le pays des mille candélabres d'or." (I,200)

In the second book of the PAN trilogy, *Un de Baumugnes*, attitudes of generosity and openness are again promoted by their association with youth, as Angèle and her infant son become a symbol of promise and hope in the middle of sterility. It is Angèle's embittered father who has imprisoned the new life in an underground cellar, just as he has entombed the goodness of his own heart under layers of repression. His adult pride and concern with social censure and his mistrust of others, born from bitter experience, translates to a loss of "innocence". Again Giono displays the inner anguish of a human through the outward sign of his relationship with the natural world. The symptom of his emotional impotence is a dead right arm, which renders him incapable of working the land. "On avait mis le bras du patron entre de petites planches, comme on dirait dans un cercueil." (I,258) But acting as the catalyst for a regeneration of the people and the land, Angèle escapes above ground from the darkness and into the light, to nurse her baby outside in the dawn of a new day:

"Mr Pancrace mâchait la fleur du sein comme un éperdu ; il lui coulait des fils de lait sur toute la figure ; jusque dans son œil clignait sans s'interrompre. C'était beau ! C'était la leçon de la vie." (I,308)

As Julie Sabini has noted<sup>1</sup>, Giono often depicts the biological rhythms of the female body as being in accord with the rhythm of all life on earth. Amédée, watching this timeless act, likens the new mother to: "un morceau de la terre, le pareil d'un arbre, d'une colline, d'une

<sup>1</sup>Julie Sabiani, *Giono et la terre*, p.65



rivière, d'une montagne." (I,308) Through the nourishment of the mother's milk, the baby is linked into the enduring chain of life.

In *Regain* the ongoing theme of regeneration culminates in the new life that Arsule carries within her. She dreams of nursing her baby in the grass, and when the first neighbours arrive she takes the two little daughters of the family by the hand to walk them through the fields and to introduce them to the animals, plants, sounds and smells. "Ainsi, les petites ont commencé leur amitié avec cette nouvelle terre", on a day which was "le plus beau jour de toute cette fin d'automne." (I,424)

Such scenes reveal that it is often with its benevolent face that Pan rewards the capacity for spontaneity, wonderment and imaginative abandon that Giono presents as an attitude of youth, enjoyed in the early years of life and retained in later years by only a select few. As we have already noted, for Giono "Pan" is on one level a metaphor for the creative energy of the world-transforming poetic force, where to approach the natural world with the openly imaginative attitude of a child is to forge a positive link between the powers of nature and human creativity.

This attitude is made evident early in "Présentation de Pan": a piece of writing which, like so much of the author's work, is difficult to categorise with any precision, but which is generally regarded as the first of Giono's published essays. The work was composed after the writing of *Regain*, to serve as an introduction to the trilogy and as an "explanation" of the grouping of the three novels. Written in the first person, it is the first of Giono's writing of any length that can be labelled directly "autobiographical"<sup>1</sup>. Within a short collection of anecdotes, memories and observations, which one suspects moves so smoothly between the real and the fictitious that the reader cannot locate the seams, Giono recounts his meeting (as an adult) with the "true" characters of *Colline* and, in particular, how he had sat up with the "real" Janet on the evening of his death. But most notably, the script suggests the awakening of the much younger Jean to the discovery of his creative powers and the lyrical worlds that they will engender.

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<sup>1</sup> This excludes some early writings, conceived in the 1920's, but not published until the late 1980's under the title *Images d'un jour de pluie, et autres récits de jeunesse*, which experimented with an evocation of the author's childhood years and local life of the period. Giono returned to several of these ideas later, when writing his novels.

Giono begins this piece of writing by depicting the wild, raw and free countryside surrounding the mountain of Lure. A lover of that symbolic representation of reality, the virtual world of maps, he first unfolds a road map of the neighbourhood of the Durance. “Par désir d’évasion, je lis les cartes comme je lis les livres”, Giono has told Tao Amrouche.<sup>1</sup> Maps (especially those of faraway, exotic places), are another vehicle of “safe adventure”. As Marcel Neveux suggests, they offer Giono another way of making space inoffensive: “L’objet qui est pour les autres un instrument de l’aventure, est converti par Giono en accessoire domestique, qui rend l’aventure superflue.”<sup>2</sup> The use of this object made of ink and paper provides a point of entry into a fictional world. Above the green tints which mark the lower land of the region around the Durance and the red arteries which mark the roads, is an area devoid of hues and markings where “tout est blanc de la pâleur des terres inconnues.”(I,755) This vacuum represents Lure: “la montagne libre et neuve qui vient à peine d’émerger du déluge.”(I,755) The idea of this mysterious mountain fascinated his mind as a child and haunted his early dreams, and it is while searching for a vantage point from where he can see Lure that the young Giono first comes to know the valleys and hills surrounding Manosque. But the sight of the mountain eludes him. Lure is the young poet’s first territory of “l’au-delà”, a mythical land of dreams lost somewhere out there in “le large”. In “Présentation de Pan” the author tells of his burning desire to “voir ce pays d’au-delà.” [emphasis, Giono’s] “Le ciel, là-bas, était pareil à de l’eau claire.”(I,757) The mountain represents all things desired and unattainable, and symbolises the need for mystery. When it is given a definite form, as it is described in *Colline*, calm, blue and haunted by circling grey vultures, it completely dominates the landscape with its mysterious presence to the point of controlling the basic rhythms of life. Throughout the day it slowly climbs between the earth and the sun, so that well before evening its shadow brings night to the Bastides.

To enter into this land, one must travel on foot: “Plus de chemins. Les traces humaines font peureusement le tour de la montagne.” (I,755). For the traveller, Giono informs the reader: “le vent est comme un ruisseau et coule à travers votre tête.”(I,755) Its force purifies the mind and prepares it for a new way of perceiving the world (just as it purifies Arsule and Panturle, preparing them for the new beginning) so that: “vous voilà clarifié et lavé.”(I,75) Starting with this clean slate, Giono causes the wind to work its alchemy so that the description of the landscape passes to one which is manifestly formed by the writer’s

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<sup>1</sup> *Entretiens*, p.87

<sup>2</sup> Marcel Neveux, *Jean Giono ou le bonheur d’écrire*, p.223

imagination. The solid aspects of the habitual world are destabilised: “tout coule comme un sable” (I,755) while the ethereal becomes concrete: “une force froide durcit l’air transparent.”(ibid.) In this way, the author creates a unique place/space where no one has ever been before, where nothing which has been deduced or invented up until now has any significance. As it is for the writer before a blank page, or the newborn opening its eyes on an unknown world, everything remains to be discovered. With a sudden urgency, the living forces of the surrounding landscape complete the process of returning the traveller to his/her original state of openness – the stones chew at your shoes, the wind snatches your scarf. “Vous voilà nu en face de la terre.”(I,755) You have become like the primitive humans of Giono’s first novels, or Ulysses thrown up on the beach, stripped of the trappings of civilisation, and of the habit of dependence on rational thought. For those who are capable, it is possible to go beyond this state of receptive simplicity and to enter into a further realm of discovery. With the right heart attitude, one can advance into the very presence of a now benign Pan.

“Alors, si l’on a le courage de tout abandonner de gaieté de cœur, si l’on n’a plus d’orgueil que pour le poil de sa poitrine, on avance, porté par les ailes d’une musique intérieure<sup>1</sup> et, un pas après, on trouve sous le chêne un homme aux bon yeux qui paît ses trois brebis en flûtant sur un sifflet de roseau.” (I,755).

Who is represented here through the use of an all inclusive *on*? The word *poil* not only closely links humans and animals in a type of *panique* energy, but reminds us that the “one” being spoken of here includes the author as a grown man. The juxtaposition of this passage with the sentence which immediately follows and where the narrative moves into the first person, suggests that the man has become the child: “ J’avais sept ans quand, pour la première fois, j’entendis parler de cette montagne.” (I,755/6)

The child that the author describes is the “petit Giono” with the “tendre” heart and “gestes aimables” (I,759) towards the features of the countryside that formed the playground of his youth. Giono would have his reader believe that to enter into the mysteries of this territory (and to receive the promised reward of healing within) the adult traveller (and the poet/writer) has merely to immerse his mind in the surrounding natural world and return to a similar childlike attitude of simplicity and open inquiry before it.

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<sup>1</sup> *Musique intérieure*: The close association of music with the poetic word will be demonstrated later in this chapter. The heart attitude of the poet remains that of the child, open to experience the world.

This idea will persist in its most simple form even into the novels regarded as the works of transition which develop the change in style between Giono's supposed "two manners". In *Pour saluer Melville*, the recently acquainted Herman and Adelina become aware of an empathetic bond which allows them to retreat from the everyday world into an imaginative domain of their own mutual creation. Like two children playing at house outdoors in the fields, they find a little "room" in a thicket.

"Ils entrèrent à travers les branches par des sortes de couloirs et, en effet, ils arrivèrent au milieu du taillis, dans une petite chambre verte avec un sol d'herbe très tendre que le gel des nuits n'avait pas encore touché."(III,62)

There, they sit down to talk and to open their minds to one another. The enclosure not only provides a secure haven from the concerns of the adult world, but also represents that inner core of the spirit, still green and untainted and constantly in the process of growth and change, that can be accessed through the imagination. For the reader who is familiar with Giono's code, the actions of the two characters establish them as exceptional people, in an exceptional relationship – joined at the heart.

The didactic quality that is to be found in the early novels can be seen to spring from the underlying emphasis on Giono's belief in humankind's general need for spiritual regeneration. There is a strong element of apparent naivety in this early utopian vision, yet Giono is in truth an astute observer of human behaviour, as his portrayal of the characters in his first novel *Naissance de l'Odyssée* already suggests and the irony employed in the later *Chroniques* and the *Angelo* cycle, clearly confirms. As Pierre Citron notes, naivety is a trait that Giono will enjoy attributing to himself from 1945 on, and one which he will very openly communicate to some of his most favoured future characters. "Elle est pour lui une garantie d'honnêteté, et de regard neuf sur les choses"<sup>1</sup> says Citron. Beyond the PAN trilogy, as the adults of Giono's novels gradually become more psychologically complex, and the world they inhabit evolves to become more sophisticated (and more treacherous) his heroes retain some childlike qualities which reveal them to be characters of sensitivity and imagination: from Toussaint's voice which we are told remains clear and naive in *Le Chant du monde*, and Bobi's "passion pour l'inutile" (II,438) in *Que ma joie demeure*; to the post-war works of the

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Citron, *Giono, 1895 -1970*, p.541

“second manner”, through Melville with “la tendresse timide de son cœur forcené”(III,724), and the imprudent generosity of Angelo in the cycle of that name.<sup>1</sup>

Giono's studies of children themselves can be seen as companion pieces to the tales which promote the attitude of the child in the adult. Stories in which he portrays the central character as a child are always autobiographical in nature to some degree: portraits of the emerging artist that reveal some perspective of the world as it is seen by the embryonic writer. Even the one tale specifically designed for an audience of children – “Le Petit Garçon qui avait envie d'espace” – falls into this category, as the story of a boy who becomes frustrated by his attempt to see the space that lies beyond his limited horizons, until he discovers “mind travel”. Sandra Beckett describes this tale as “une parabole de la découverte de l'espace poétique” and notes the striking contrast between the “le beau pays bleu et joyeux des espaces, où les oiseaux se réunissent dans une grande fête, et le monde clos, sombre et triste d'en bas, où l'enfant reste cloué à la fin de cette morne journée.”<sup>2</sup> Along with the undeniable physical limitations that nature imposes upon members of the human species, the world of civilisation, that has its parameters determined by adults, leaves the child with a sense of separation from the vitality of the living world. The sense of loss is felt intensely, until the exciting revelation of a solution to the problem by exercising the freedom of the mind. “Pour l'imagination dynamique, le vol est une beauté première”<sup>3</sup> Bachelard has said in acknowledgment of the child's propensity for unfettered flights of imagination. Although its concrete reality is hidden from his eyes by the artificial barrier of cultivated hedges, the little boy fervently believes the countryside (“l'au-delà”) to be a place of magical splendour and beauty, because the birds that fly above it have adorned themselves in “des vêtements si magnifiques pour l'habiter.” (V,856)

The young Giono, avid reader and evolving poet, had himself learnt at an early age the joy that can be seized through the imagination by dematerialising and spiritualising reality in the manner of the little boy of the story above. About the time of writing *Colline*, Giono had drawn from his childhood experience in order to compose a short story, written in the first person narrative, which tells of being taken by his mother on regular visits to an aunt; an old

<sup>1</sup> In the *Chroniques* this will take on a different form, with protagonists who are often anti-heroes, who find various means (sometimes involving trickery or violence) to evade the essential unhappiness of the general human condition and thus to find a form of hope. This is beyond the scope of our discussion here, but remains a question of awareness and imagination.

<sup>2</sup> Sandra Beckett, “Le Petit Garçon qui avait envie d'espace”, in *Giono Romancier*, p.60

<sup>3</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *L'air et les songes*, p. 80.

lady whose every movement produced a sound like the “craquements de bois sec”<sup>1</sup> that Giono will later confer on the tall, thin man known as Madame-la-Reine, whenever he moves his arms and legs in *Jean le Bleu*. While the adults conversed, the young Jean would slip out and down the street to the corner store where he could crouch alone with his imagination among the sacks, barrels and bottles that contained exotic goods from foreign lands. Giono entitles his story “Le Voyageur immobile”, because “C’est dans cette épicerie que je venais m’embarquer pour les premiers voyages vers ces pays de derrière l’air.” (III,118) The young traveller begins his imaginary flight within the image of a bird, then immediately transforms its shape into another trajectory that can skim swiftly and freely across “le large” – the boat: “On semblait être dans la poitrine d’un oiseau : le plafond montait en voûte aiguë dans l’ombre. La poitrine d’un oiseau ? Non la cale d’un navire.” (III,119)

Giono has already linked the boat at speed with the bird in flight in *Naissance de l’Odyssée*: “l’oiseau de bois et de toile.” (I,17) In “Le Voyageur immobile”, the bird and the boat, as familiar objects encompassing the idea of liberation, allow the young Jean to first experience Giono’s general propensity for what Redfern has called “a safe excitement”<sup>2</sup>, or travel without danger. Cocooned within the centre of his own world, the child can comfortably experience the dynamic of speed and the thrill of adventure: a resolution through the mind of the ever-present conflict between the desire for security and the pull of the unknown.

Michèle Belghmi recognises the importance of this conflict within *l’imaginaire gionien*, in her book *Giono et la Mer*, and says in her introduction to this work: “L’espace marin est essentiellement, dans l’oeuvre de Giono, un espace imaginaire, lieu d’évasion mais aussi refuge privilégié du «voyageur immobile»”.<sup>3</sup> Like his creation, the new Ulysses, who imagines a series of fantastic adventures while watching a fragment of floating bark circumnavigate a pond, whenever he sits at his table to put pen to paper the adult Giono feels himself to be still just as much a *voyageur immobile* as the little boy in the shop and the little boy who floated sticks on the town basins in Manosque. “Un roman est un voyage, et la rencontre de personnages nouveaux.”<sup>4</sup> he has said. And at another time : “Si j’écris, il faut

<sup>1</sup> “Le Voyageur immobile”, in *Le Eau Vive*, III, p.119

<sup>2</sup> W.D. Redfern, *The Private World of Jean Giono*, p.49

<sup>3</sup> Michèle Belghmi, *Giono et la Mer*, p.17

<sup>4</sup> Conversation with Amrouche, cited in *Entretiens*, p.195

que je ne sache pas où je vais [...] le plaisir de l'apprendre, la curiosité de l'apprendre me poussent à écrire".<sup>1</sup>

The exploration of the developmental years of the poet/storyteller which the author has touched on briefly in individual stories and in "Présentation de Pan" is continued in what is considered to be Giono's major autobiographical work, *Jean le Bleu*. It is generally accepted that it is impossible to know exactly how much of this novel is "truth" and how much "fiction" and that Giono himself no longer knew, nor cared to know, at the time of its composition. "Il y a autant de réalités que d'individus", he has written, when reflecting on the nature of reality, and : "je n'ai pas besoin de passion pour déformer la vérité, il me suffit d'être vivant pour le faire."<sup>2</sup> Here, in conversation with Jean Amrouche Giono explains his approach to this particular work: "C'est ma vie intérieure que j'ai voulu décrire dans *Jean le Bleu*. Cette vie qui était essentiellement magique. Je ne pouvais pas la raconter autrement qu'en créant autour de moi les personnages qui n'existaient pas dans la réalité, mais qui étaient les personnages magiques de mon enfance."<sup>3</sup> Jacques Chabot, in his article "Les narrateur et ses doubles dans 'Jean le Bleu'", holds the work to be "la première en date des *Chroniques*, à la manière de Noé, qui narrent la véridique histoire du romancier racontant des histoires, même quand il feint d'expliquer sa vie."<sup>4</sup> and elsewhere he sums up *Jean le Bleu* rather neatly as "un art poétique en forme d'autobiographie romancée."<sup>5</sup>

The first memory we are invited to share with Jean, leads us symbolically down a pathway into the very heart of his world. It is that of the route running from Piedmont to "ici", a town which is not named, but which we recognise as the Manosque of Giono's childhood. The immediate impression is of life, in all its richness and activity and Giono's liberal use of verbs of movement establishes the road of that time as a living entity, carrying with it its procession of trees, carts and travellers. For the reader, the road provides a concrete link with Giono's ancestral past, while taking us into the town which was the birthplace of the young Jean. On the way it supplies a flood of direct sense-impressions. Sights on several levels are seen from the hill, like a view from an illustrated story-book, smells are immediate and strong and sounds equally intense and layered. Giono then describes the colours of spring: the green flame that lights the evening hills, the bluish heat

<sup>1</sup> Conversation with R. Ricatte of September 1966, cited by Ricatte, I Préface, p. XXVII.

<sup>2</sup> Originally from a preface to a work by Georges Navel, reprinted in *Bulletin:35, printemps-été, 1991*

<sup>3</sup> *Entretiens*. p.81

<sup>4</sup> Jaques Chabot, in *Jean Giono 2 :l'imagination de la mort. La Revue des Lettres Modernes*. p.13

<sup>5</sup> Chabot, *Giono, Beau Fixe*.p.99

haze over the river and orchards full of bright flowers. Before our eyes he has conjured the fairyland of “once upon a time”: “Ici, les terres étaient, à l’époque, des prés et de doux vergers qui esplendissaient en un printemps magnifique.”(II,4)

“Ici”, then, marks a frontier. It is where the road, traditionally planted with poplars, came to an end – “Elle venait jusqu’ici mais pas plus loin.”(II,3) – to form the border enclosing the fictional land of the springtime of Giono’s youth. The designated territory is formed from memories enhanced by a mind which seeks out beauty, drama and the stimulation of the exotic. It reflects Giono’s general rejection of modernity and need for security which manifests in a desire to remain within the era of his childhood, which is really that of the nineteenth century: the world which shaped his beloved father. Provence, at the time of Giono’s birth (as Jacques Chabot points out in his article), was not the contemporary of Paris. Giono, says Chabot, “s’est retrouvé anachronique”<sup>1</sup>. Had he been born into the fashionable quarters of Paris, rather than at Manosque, he would have been born into a world with a more advanced time frame than that existing in *les Basses-Alpes*. In his book *La Provence de Giono*, Chabot has also written: “La vision de Giono suspend le cours du temps [...] la Provence qu’il aime et qu’il nous raconte reste celle de son enfance, *fixée* comme par enchantement à l’époque de son enfance.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, as Jean-François Durand has noted<sup>3</sup>, even this world is not the true world that was, but one which through its very separation forms a ritualised social space which transforms and romanticises daily life.

For the child, however, possessing what Giono declares to be “cet œil pur des enfants”<sup>4</sup> which allows him to see “le vrai visage”<sup>5</sup> of the world (which seems to be the world of possibilities which remains hidden from those without true sight), the universe into which he integrates himself is one of solid authenticity. In *Jean le Bleu*, the psyche of the very young Jean is a highly sensitised receptor of experiences enabling him to live within his own firmly established Eden of innocence, which in reality is based in the garden of his convent school. For Jean, it is : “un gros fruit plein de chair et de jus” (I,14,) where the encircling, protective walls press the fruit so that it spurts and bubbles over with lilacs and with bee-filled ivy that foams like the froth of jam. Within this enclosed paradise, little, plump Sister Dorothée builds a path with small pebbles inset into huge sweeping arcs, which the eye allows you to

<sup>1</sup>Chabot, “Giono passéiste ? Oui, mais à sa façon” in *Giono Beau Fixe*, p.317

<sup>2</sup> Chabot, *La Provence de Giono*, p.14

<sup>3</sup> Durand, *Les métamorphoses de l’artiste*, p.116

<sup>4</sup> Manosque des-plateaux, *Récits et essais*, p17

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



see only a segment at a time. The rest of the path trails off into the garden, where, Jean speculates, it must venture away into the frightening world: “là-bas, loin, loin, au-delà des murs et des collines qu’on apercevait un peu, et dieu seul sait par où il s’en allait tourner”(II,14). Like most of the paths that the many wanderers of Giono’s novels must follow, it will lead the traveller far from the well traced routes of security into what the author has called elsewhere: “des endroits où il ne passe personne.” (Provence, III,211) Places where one must confront the reality of one’s isolation in an alien world, as Bobi will do in *Que ma joie demeure*. Denis Labouret, in a discussion on the importance of the road in the history of the novel, says that it: “spatialise et vectorise le temps humain: l’état des routes [...] représente le destin de l’homme. Les détours des routes [...] inscrivent dans l’espace les tournants et les nouveautés de l’existence.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout the course of *Jean le Bleu* the young Jean, having lost Eden to become a pupil at a “petit collège lépreux” (II,27) that the town has banished beyond its walls, will himself gradually move out into the world on the path to manhood which lies beyond innocence. There, exposed to what the world calls “reality”, his gaze will lose much of “sa couleur bleue, sa clarté sa fraîcheur.”(I,125) But in the walled garden, when Jean and his playmates hide with Sister Dorothée under the great rose laurel to feed her the forbidden delights of chocolate, life has an intensity and security which is as yet sweet and simple. The laurel is: “vraiment gros et fort comme un homme [...] plein d’épaisseur et de beaux mensonges.” (II,16) Cocooned within, the miscreants feel sheltered and completely concealed from the sharp eyes of the punitive Sister Philomène. The laurel allows what will always remain for Giono as the ultimate euphoria – safety amidst the fascination of danger. “On l’aimait pour ça jusqu’à abandonner toute sa vie”(II,16).

In the early Gionian dreamworld of intense sensation the sense of smell is perhaps the most favoured of all and Giono saturates the air of his early novels with odours. Here, the fragrance of the plant which shelters the young Jean is so heavy that it produces a form of synaesthesia: “Cette odeur pesait sur mes yeux.”(II,15) In other words, its headiness affects the boy’s brain causing a distortion in his vision. Giono intensifies the whimsical aspect of the scene by making use of the corporeal body of his character in a detached manner, as if it was an instrument to interpret the world, manoeuvring the eyes of the young Jean like a camera at the same time as he has the boy describe his experience in language which has a lyrical intensity. Under the intoxication produced by the fragrance, the mind deconstructs the world that comes within the immediate field of vision and scrambles it into a surreal collage:

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<sup>1</sup> Denis Labouret, *Les grands chemins de Giono*, p. 21

“Dans l’ombre bleue, le visage de mes petits camarades fondait comme du cierge allumé, fondait et coulait, et il y en avait des taches dans l’herbe, et il y en avait des taches dansantes dans l’ombre, comme des morceaux de suif fondu qui y flottaient, portant un œil, une bouche, une oreille, ou la petite fenêtre rouge et luisante d’une joue.”(II,15)

The pattern which follows is the writer’s usual one of an immediate reconstruction of the world following on from its deconstruction. The eyes find a focus on Sister Dorothée as she stretches out on the grass and the mind makes use of the nun’s barren black robe to build an entire landscape:<sup>1</sup> “bossué de montagnes et de collines, creusé de vallées sèches et silencieuses, sans eau, sans arbres”(II,15). All that is alive in this chaste desert is the nun’s face, expanded by the author into an entire “monde heureux” (ibid), as the sensuous pleasure of eating becomes her very existence. Giono gives us the view of an isolated mouth, savouring forbidden fruit (chocolate), and as the lips make their final “bruit humide”(ibid), the focus shifts to become even more selective. An extreme close-up, under a ray of sunlight, of a human cheek as a microcosmic field, becomes a celebration within the boy’s spirit of the ecstatic pleasure of being young and being alive: “sa joue se veloutait d’un duvet blond que dans mon ivresse d’odeur je voyais onduler et voguer comme un vaste océan d’herbes mûres.”(II,15)

The above scene depicts one of the rare occasion when the young Jean is found in the company of other children. Even in this social situation, his reactions to the surrounding world are isolating because of their intensity and their complete subjectivity. It is not just the factor of age that marks the boy out as a person of exceptional sensitivity. The use of synaesthetic imagery emphasises the extreme sensuousness of a very individual world and establishes a degree of heightened awareness that will ensure that the creativity and spontaneity natural to youth will persist into this particular child’s adulthood. Giono believes that his life experience set him apart from others at an early age:

“Je n’étais pas un garçon comme les autres – je suis resté un garçon qui n’est pas comme les autres - je suis fait presque pour l’entier avec la chair et le cœur de mon père.”<sup>2</sup>

These words are notable, also, as one of several occasions where Giono attests to the strong (and positive) influence of his father – portrayed as a sensitive artisan and a man of

<sup>1</sup> Durand (op.cit., p.115), sees Sister Dorothée : “ s’agrandit aux dimensions d’une mère primordiale, Terre-mère des mythes archaïques”, and combines her aspects with the masculine aspects of the laurel to form a superprotective couple.

<sup>2</sup>Unfinished text circa 1936, quoted by Citron, op.cit., p.187

great generosity – over the formative years of his life. In the novel *Jean le Bleu* the importance of the role of his real-life father as friend, and above all as guide and educator, is underscored by the fact that it is divided among several key characters.

Giono was the son of his father's later years, so that in some respects Jean Antoine himself filled a double role – that of father and paternal grandfather. Perhaps this is the reason why Giono, as Citron tells us,<sup>1</sup> was fascinated by the fictional possibilities presented by the intergenerational relationships within families. In *Mort d'un personnage* ( a tale of the ageing and death of Pauline de Théus, which was written at the same time as Giono's own mother, Pauline, was dying) Giono introduces us to the young Angelo Pardi, along with his father and his father's mother, Pauline – making three generations of characters. But there is another character, ever present if only in spirit, made manifest in the imagination of Pauline through an enduring love and a determined will: Angelo's grandfather. Just as Giono was himself, or believed he was, or would have us believe he was (Citron's research reveals that this belief is largely built on fantasy and embellishment), the young Angelo is descended from a grandfather who was a *carbonaro*. This ancestor is the adult Angelo who forms the main character of the *Hussard* cycle. Philippe Arnaud, notes (as several others have done) the debt that Giono's adult Angelo owes to the Italian poet Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, and has this to say also : “ Mais l'Arioste est plus qu'une source livresque pour Giono, c'est une source vivante parce qu'il tire son héros d'un grand-père mythique qui tend à se confondre dans sa mémoire avec les personnages de *Roland Furieux*. ”<sup>2</sup> There is, as well, a general recognition of another literary influence in the inventive mix, which has been explored in detail by Jean-Yves Laurichesse<sup>3</sup>: the heroes of Stendhal, in particular Fabrice del Dongo.

Norma Goodrich<sup>4</sup> offers an interesting study on the autobiographical aspects of the (grand)mother child relationship in *Mort d'un personnage*, and believes that this book is as much an autobiographical novel as is *Jean le Bleu*. Certainly the young Angelo seems to have been drawn from the young Jean, as an only child with the same creativity, sensuality and love of the unusual. In this novel, then, Giono champions the dream by very openly re-inventing aspects of his childhood, as does the character of Odripano (one of the doubles of Jean's father) in *Jean le Bleu*. And as if to underline this fact, the author puts these words

<sup>1</sup> “Notice” for *Mort d'un personnage*, IV, p.1241

<sup>2</sup> Philippe Arnaud, “Angelo Furioso” in *Giono dans sa culture*, p.238

<sup>3</sup> See Jean-Yves Laurichesse, *Giono et Stendhal. Chemins de lecture et de création*.

<sup>4</sup> Goodrich, *Giono: Master of fictional modes*, Chapter 6

into the mouth of the young Angelo :“Je ne sais d’ailleurs pas, là-dedans, ce qui est exactement mon vrai souvenir personnel ou ce qui me vient des récits de mon père.” (IV,146).

In both books, the realm of childhood is the playground of a free, creative spirit – celebrating a conscious enjoyment, from an early age, of the game of invention. The young Jean, loosely based on the reality of Giono’s childhood, will metamorphose into Angelo, continuing the overall movement which has taken place across the body of Giono’s early work (a movement which was announced and outlined within his first novel, *Naissance de l’Odyssée*), where all reality gradually becomes effaced and is eventually replaced by fictional worlds such as the one which the adult Angelo, the *carbonaro*, controls and chooses to inhabit. Although the work, *Mort d’un personnage*, forms part of the *Hussard* or *Angelo* cycle, composed much later than the pre-war novels that we have based this study on, it is a revealing exercise to compare the development of the two young “Gionos”. Philippe Arnaud has suggested that the Angelo of the cycle represents “le moi idéal de Giono”, but not, he goes on to say, “‘l’idéal du moi’ freudien car il s’agit ici, à mon sens, d’une régression narcissique par laquelle Giono retrouve *la tendresse timide* de son *cœur forcené*.”<sup>1</sup>

Jean and Angelo II begin the early years of their schooling in a similar manner. Both receive their formal education through sisters at a convent school. In *Jean le Bleu*, Giono describes the three apprentices from his mother’s business who take it in turns to walk him to school. The motherless Angelo is taken to his by a more fanciful creature, a servant girl from the asylum for the blind where his gentle father is the director. The girl, “Pov’ fille”, is “très sensible à la liberté.” (IV, 144) For the free-spirited Angelo, as they leave the house and look out over the ocean in the early morning light, they are two souls in concert. Stepping out together they make “un seul quadrupède libre” (IV,144), and each morning Angelo harbours the fervent hope that somehow, in a few giant steps, the beast that their two spirits in unison have conceived will transport them across the sea to the other side of the world. Angelo’s desire to explore the unknown, with the adult beside him as a shield, is a more developed form of the mind voyage that the young Jean begins to make from the safety of his home, when he climbs a high staircase to the vast attic and the large window. Gazing beyond the rooftops Jean’s mind creates the wind and marine images that Giono has always associated with adventure:

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<sup>1</sup> Arnaud, op.cit., p.237

“Je revois cette profondeur marine qui grondait au-delà de la ville. Toute la plaine fumait sous l’écume des routes. Des champs, frais hersés, s’envolaient des embruns tordus. Le vent faisait son chemin ...”(II,37)

[As Jean-Françoise Durand has identified, the wind symbolises the liberation of the latent creativity of the young ego. Durand’s study encompasses the entire corpus of Giono’s fictional work and throughout all, he says, the wind is linked to : “la puissance fécondante de la parole. Il est un signe d’ouverture et d’expansion.” In examining *Jean le Bleu*, in particular, he notes: “il sème dans le Moi un impérieux désir de fuite, qui est aussi un désir de transfiguration du réel dans l’œuvre. Le vent ouvre les espaces poémagogiques du Moi. S’il élargit l’espace du monde, il découvre aussi des espaces intérieurs qui portent l’œuvre à venir.”<sup>1</sup> The work to come, says Durand, will be nothing more than the orchestration of this first impulse, the outworking of the dream.]

... “Le vent faisait son chemin et tout tremblait dans son sillage, on sentait qu’il s’en allait droit devant lui, qu’il était là, mais que déjà ses yeux s’élargissaient sur de nouveaux pays étalés et faisant la roue comme de gros oiseaux de toutes les couleurs. On sentait qu’il était puissant et doux, qu’il suffisait de s’appuyer un peu fort à son flanc pour être emporté dans le monde. On sentait que ce désir de fuite il le semait en vous comme une lente graine féroce et qu’on serait déchiré plus tard par d’énormes racines mouvantes comme des poulpes. Je sentais que le vent s’enracinait en moi.” (II,37/38)

For the two young “Giono s” portrayed in the author’s work, one begins to manufacture the dream so that the other can live in it. As Angelo II steps out with Pov’ fille in the mornings, the seeds that Jean has earlier sensed the winds of creativity sow in his head, have taken root. The boy’s external world is one born of pure mental projection. The north wind immediately strikes the wild duck’s feather which adorns his red hat, symbol of nonconformity and imaginative freedom, and: “Elle frémissait jusque dans les racines qu’elle avait plantées dans ma tête.” (IV,144).

For Jean, however, the world which he inhabits, although instinctively interiorised, transformed and romanticised by his child’s mind, is still built on the solid base of the material haunts of Giono’s childhood because it is constructed with an abundance of physical elements which speak of austere reality. In Jean’s house the poverty is tangible: there is too much “lèpre de terre” on the walls, too much darkness that smells of “mauvais champignon”,

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<sup>1</sup> Durand, op. cit., p.118

and too many sounds “dans l'épaisseur des pierres.” (II,37) The building is so solidly anchored in the dank earth that Jean feels that it would be impossible to live at peace in the lower floors without his growing ability to efface them and replace them with the spaces of his imagination. By contrast, Angelo's home is built only with the substance of shadows. The realm which Angelo inhabits is the creation of an adult novelist who invents yet another childhood, this time one set within the geography of Marseille. But the reality of this solid, material space – the existing town – is transformed, through the subjective perception of the various characters that inhabit it, into another reality: a world of constantly renewing sense-impressions that ensure a lack of basic stability. This whole world is made with the abstract forms and concepts and with the imbricate spaces that allow what Pierre Citron calls: “des espaces de nature différente où simultanément vivent les mêmes personnages<sup>1</sup>” that Giono began experimenting with in *Naissance de l'Odyssée*. They are manifestly a product of the creative imagination of an ever present author, who is at the same time the child, the man, a witness, creator and narrator. The author enjoys showing his hand as much as he enjoys playing the game. The superhuman strength of will exhibited by Angelo's grandmother in her desperate effort not to see all the richness of life which Giono evokes before her senses is a solemn and silent celebration of the triumph of the mind over matter. Her rejection of the here and now in her desire to be reunited with her lost love keeps him ever present to the reader's mind, while her refusal to live fully in a world which no longer contains his physical presence creates a material uncertainty in her own physical form. Angelo, says Henri Godard, is “un témoin fasciné”, of the aged Pauline's defiance of the world, “capable d'en sentir la profondeur, qui saura un jour en tirer tous les enseignement et trouvera à son tour les mots pour la dire.”<sup>2</sup> “Ma grand-mère jouissait d'une sorte d'exterritorialité universelle. À part sa poigne, à part son pas, à part son cœur, elle n'était que fumée. Son corps n'existait que par la grâce du destin, qu'elle avait tracé comme modèle de redingote à la couturière.”(IV,159) The author contrasts this extraordinary wraith with the ordinary – the other old ladies of Marseille who have “l'air extrêmement terrestre”(IV,163), and who never lose contact with the earth but shuffle forward on the soles of their feet: “comme des limaces constamment collées aux parois.” (ibid.) To observe the evolution in the relationship that Giono's heroes have with the world one has only to compare this Pauline of *Mort d'un personnage* with the total solidity of Panturle at the end of the much earlier novel, *Regain*: “enfoncé dans la terre comme une colonne.” (I,429) There is, as well, an exquisite

<sup>1</sup> Citron, *Notice – Mort d'un personnage*, IV, p.1257

<sup>2</sup> Godard, *D'un Giono l'autre*, p.101

tenderness, complexity and subtlety in the finely detailed portrait of the passing of this character from the realm of life to the realm of death (with the added poignancy that this study is based on Giono's own mother), which throws into relief the simple lyricism of the stories of the cycle of PAN.

The notable thing about the relationship of Giono's later "sentient" characters with their surrounding external world, is the flowering within them of an ability to fabricate with skill and by choice, through a sophisticated act of the will rather than by an abandonment of the conscious mind to sensation or emotion. As a result of her interior emptiness, Pauline chooses to reject the reality of the world. But this rejection is accompanied by such a sense of immediate pain that she will not replace her loss with a dream. For her there is no existentialist dilemma because she prefers not to exist. In the same novel, Giono sets in opposition to Pauline, the young Caille; a woman deprived of sight. Like Giono, the boy, Caille defies reality through the passionate pursuit of a dream. Like Giono the man, she elects to invent a rich and complex world of shapes and colours within her mind so that "*si elle ne pouvait pas connaître ce qu'étaient en réalité la prairie, le soleil et la couleur, elle se jetait si violemment de tout son coeur vers ces réalités que la représentation qu'elle s'en faisait avait une qualité terrestre.*"(IV,195) Hers is an act of will-power just as intense as Pauline's and both women live in a universe created by their own imagination. But one is "aveugle de cœur"(193) and selects "les bosquets de l'enfer"(192); while the other, blind in the physical sense, selects the "l'âme du monde; l'espoir d'Orphée."(192)

Angelo's home, the house of the blind at Marseille, is a "république d'ombres, de cris et de silence"(IV,143). Every school day morning as Angelo moves away physically from this nebulous place with Pov' fille, his world gradually takes on its concrete form, but a concrete form with a considerable plasticity which is constantly moulded and reshaped by the mind. The world, at first, contains no visual images and is composed only of movement and sounds which speak of the sea and of adventure: the pair make a rapid descent of the hill, with the skirts of the girl flapping like sails, into the town which has begun to rumble gently behind its windows, and past the solitary, immobile, old news-vendor, whose papers flap and clack in the wind like the leaves of an exotic palm tree. As they enter the heart of the town, the world grows in complexity as the air becomes saturated with smells: a magic brew of all the odours that make up urban life. A rapid journey past the odour-breathing markets and then offices, cafés and bars where assorted scents and smells seep from behind every closed door. From around the doorways of certain utilitarian businesses (most noticeable from amongst them,

the offices of the bank ) comes the strong and unpleasant smell of urine, but from under the doors of some little shops the delightful mixed odours of exotica immediately transport the little “voyageur immobile”: “En passant devant les portes de ces épiceries, je voyais leurs devantures fermées s’enfoncer et se fondre dans les lointains de la mer.”(IV, 144)

Arrival at school is a sudden emergence into a strongly visual world where appearance is paramount and Giono’s images solidify to become composed of colour, light and shape. His young dreamer is now confronted with the reality of mixing with those who have: “les gestes ordinaires des vies ordinaires” (IV,148) – the sons of the *haute bourgeoisie*. For Giono, an abhorrence of “le sort commun”(I,8) persists. In this world of the sighted and the affluent Angelo is immediately set apart by his costume of a Scottish lord, and Giono amusingly underlines his protagonist’s indifference (and his own continuing opposition) to the dictates of fashion, by informing us that the outfit was selected by a young blind woman. The other boys are primed in fashionable sailor suits or dressed as “dandys languissants” (IV,145) with powdered faces above their high cravats, or as “lions de dix ans” (ibid) in boots of patent leather. These are mythical, unreal creatures of the imagination, but they represent the inhabitants of the remembered world of the “normal”. Their dress is theatrical, but it is also derivative and striking in its denial of individuality. In contrast to the studied artificiality and modish precocity of the collection of other boys, Angelo remains an individual and retains the celebrated, open sensuality of the child. His heightened perceptive ability underlines his inherent superiority – his material poverty becomes a badge of his spiritual richness. When he enters the schoolhouse, the stimulation of incense remaining from the morning service awakens his mind to vivid images which are drawn from nature and serve to give some form to his perceptions – the perfume is so strong that it ceases to be an odour and in the synaesthetic manner favoured by Giono becomes a “question de bruits et de couleurs”. (IV,146) The tiniest of sounds, the surrounding rustles, creaks and whispers, dart up into the high vaulted corridors like swallows, evoking the contrasting colours of swallow feathers in the blocks of black and white which are the nuns habits, and in the pallor of hands and faces set against the glowing black and white stones which form the background which is the floor. Placed in the midst of this monochromic swallow’s plumage, Angelo is very aware of the extraordinary effect the wild duck’s feather in his red hat must be producing. Suitably theatrical lighting completes the whole effect: “Une lumière rare qui venait de hautes impostes remuait tout ce blanc et ce noir avec de longs bâtons dorés.”(IV,146)



An awareness of being different and essentially set apart from other children (a perceived reality for Giono, from his earliest days), which is never explicitly stated in *Jean le Bleu*, is here a cause for celebration and made evident through Angelo's colourful (and outrageously foreign) costume, his perception of being centre stage and the intensity of the feelings which efface and replace the man-made structures, odours and noises with those from the natural realm. The young Angelo has made the deliberate choice of the post-war heroes to live in his own profoundly subjective, fictional universe. In the process of discussing the adult Angelo as the protagonist of the *Hussard* cycle, the critic Henri Godard describes him as having a "conscience aristocratique"<sup>1</sup>. Angelo the child is a reflection of his grandfather, just as he is a reflection of the author, possessing – in an as yet inchoate form – a similar form of self-awareness which separates him from the majority of others. This point is emphasised through a celebration of the breaking of social conventions, because when Pov' fille comes for Angelo after school she is intoxicated to the point of being "pleine comme un œuf." (IV,148) Angelo has no embarrassment, nor any fear of her. On the contrary, he tells us, it is the best game of all. "Je n'aurais pas voulu, pour tout l'or du monde, être un de ces petits garçons que les femmes de chambre parfumées ramenaient comme la prune de leurs yeux." (IV,148)

As an earlier incarnation of the young Giono, Jean has as yet no need (nor the opportunity), to acquire such social awareness. The old house where his family are domiciled is, as W.D. Redfern has noted, a place where "protection and adventure overlap".<sup>2</sup> Jean's imagination and his self awareness will gradually unfold as he begins to explore this realm and from there to reach out to the surrounding world. His family are restricted to living and working in those areas of the house that remain habitable, as the dwelling decays around them, and beyond these zones of relative comfort lie corridors and rooms full of mystery. Giono's fascination with space, which will eventually extend far out into the cosmos, has its beginning with the exploration of rooms in such a state of disrepair that they remain closed and unused. For the child that is recalled by the man who has become the poet, these "empty" spaces must always be filled with something. Sometimes the shadows are colonised by the monsters of young Jean's imagination, but more often the presence he perceives is the darkness itself, which becomes a solid mass, and is often penetrated by a single ray of light which can take on various forms. These dark, enclosed areas are always capable of reflecting

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<sup>1</sup> Godard, op.cit., p.135

<sup>2</sup> W.D. Redfern, *The Private World of Jean Giono*, p.48

noise, if they cannot reflect light, and become resonating chambers filled with the energy of sound. Deep within the house is an inner court described in this way:

“Par le plein jour d’hiver la nuit restait là au fond du matin au soir. L’été, vers midi, une goutte de soleil descendait dans la cour comme une guêpe puis s’envolait.”(II,28)

This particular space hums with the endless hiccupping of the meat-grinder of the shop next door, punctuated with the scrabble of rats on the tiles. There is another space contained within this one – an ancient well that Jean’s mind populates with bloated eye-less white toads and serpents with paper-thin skins. It is a horror of confinement away from the light that gives rise to the terrifying flaccidity and pallor of their unreal, death-like existence in a clearly unpleasant association of depth, humidity and darkness. The well in the courtyard is only one of the many wells which appear in the work of Giono and his persistent fear of all dark, subterranean places has been often noted: for example, in the article “Ponge et le Pierre”, Redfern mentions his fear of the underground, “sa crainte du mot même de ‘grotte’”<sup>1</sup> For Jean the boy, dreams of escape from such fears can only begin with ascension – by leaving the dank, enclosed area behind and climbing to higher levels. The upper floors of the house contain the spaces where Jean will discover books, stories and music – tools for freedom and flight that he will avail himself of for the remainder of his life.

Beyond any doubt, the most important space existing in the universe of the young Jean is the Father’s workroom: an inner sanctuary within the overreaching protection of the house. The cobbler’s room is the place where Jean is first introduced to literature, and where he absorbs the work ethic that he will practise through all his years of writing. In later life, it will have its counterpart in the enfolding walls of the book-lined studio of Giono the workman with words. “Il a conservé le marteau de cordonnier paternel à côté de ses porte-plumes (il déteste les stylos)” acquaintance Maurice Chevaly tells us in *Giono vivant*, p.113 – a comment which points up not only Giono’s reverence for his father’s memory, but the awareness that he had of being an artisan in his own right, along with his fondness for the material tools of the craftsman and his dislike of all things modern. In the essay, “Triomphe de la vie”, Giono writes: “Depuis l’âge où j’ai su monter des escaliers tout seul, ou plus exactement depuis le moment où ma mère m’a laissé monter les escaliers tout seul, j’ai vécu le plus radieux de mes rêves à côté de l’établi de mon père.”<sup>2</sup> The workroom of his father and the transforming power of language appear to remain perpetually linked in the mind of

<sup>1</sup> W.D.Redfern, in *Jean Giono, 2 : l’imagination de la mort. La revue des lettres modernes*. p.124

<sup>2</sup> “Triomphe de la vie”, *Récits et essais*, p.662

Giono. A great iron-bound trunk full of books takes up a whole corner of the room as it is described in *Jean le Bleu*. But it is the importance of the spoken word in particular, that Giono, story-teller himself, emphasises throughout the book. In the mouth of the father and his various “doubles”, words take on a poetic dimension which has the ability to touch both the mind and the heart: to teach and to heal.

The persistent idea, that we have already identified, of the social responsibility of the artist, chosen by fate as a guide and healer to others, appears to arise directly from Giono’s childhood experience. The figure of the father represents both community and isolation. He works all alone in his studio, but the door is open with the offer of comfort and support to all those in need, such as those who find themselves far from home. Jean tells us that it is not unusual in the evenings to hear a needy young Italian, weary from too much feasting and *dolce amore*, stumbling up the stairwell in the dark. Giono recalls, in detail, his perception of his father’s actions on these occasions. The healing process always takes place through the agency of the spoken word:

“Je me souviens qu’il leur donnait toujours la chaise près de la fenêtre, puis qu’il relevait ses lunettes ; il se mettait à parler en italien à l’homme assis.... Des fois, c’était long. Des fois, le sourire venait presque tout de suite. ...Mon père ... parlait tant qu’il n’avait pas vu le sourire.... Tant que le sourire n’était pas venu, mon père parlait et, des fois, l’autre disait alors dans un souffle : « Che bellezza ! » Puis, il souriait. “ (II,5)

One evening brings a confident young man, with a sure step on the stairs. The character of Djouan<sup>1</sup> arrives in Jean’s world bringing change, as a representative of all that lies beyond the sphere of everyday life (and, thus, the father’s influence) and as a manifestation of Jean’s awakening curiosity about the world at large. Giono portrays the worldly young Djouan’s self assurance, and the charming vitality which he uses to seduce others by describing the grace of his movements : “une telle aisance de gestes, un balancement si huileux du torse, un éventement si sûr de ses longs doigts.” (II,6) This time it is the visitor who speaks from the beginning, while the father merely listens. For Jean, all the introduced charm, adventure and terror of the unknown dissipates the familiarity of the shabby workroom. It is not the content of the monologue that excites the young listener, but an awakening to the mystery and possibilities of language. Giono depicts this as the precise moment when he first becomes

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<sup>1</sup> The young man’s name is an obvious play on *Don Juan*, and on *Jean*. Giono uses this character, with his seductive charms, in several incarnations throughout his early work. But he also returns further on in *Jean le bleu*, as the older character of the Mexican, Gonzalès, who is almost mute.

aware of his own destiny, again describing intense emotion in terms of the water imagery that reflects the ripples and eddies that creativity stirs in the mind's concept of reality, and associating the expression of such feelings with the faculty of speech. Something comes to life, as the vitality of the word images drop into his very centre: "comme des pierres sur de l'eau plate" (II,8). The source of the young Jean's talent lies within – like a little spring waiting only to be primed before the words begin to flow. The excitement forms little shimmering circles in the water of his being which rise to break in his throat in bitterly cold waves. "Ça n'avait pour moi que la force d'une chanson, mais toute la force d'une chanson." (II,8) The boy is already instinctively aware of himself as an instrument through which this song will be played. "Il en était transfiguré, le parleur, comme huilé d'une lumière plus riche d'huile que la lueur pâle de notre lampe de cuivre." (ibid.) The speaker who is transfigured is also the adult Giono, portraying himself as already present in the child's imagination and anointed with the lights from an adult world beyond, that will burn far brighter than the modest glow of home.

"J'entendais des villages neufs éclore autour de moi en des éclatements de graines et vivre avec leur ruissellement de charrettes, d'araires, de torrents, de troupeaux, des envols de poules, d'hirondelles et de corbeaux." (II,8)

The call of a world waiting to be discovered births and forms itself into the comforting yet stimulating images drawn from the familiarity of the natural world, mixed with the sea-imagery which represents the unexplored and the unknown:

"Des montagnes se gonflaient sous notre parquet, me portant tout debout jusqu'aux hauteurs du ciel, comme la houle de quelque géante mer. Et j'étais là-haut, pauvre naufragé extasié, déchiré de mon père, arraché du bon havre solide de sa bouche, de la belle frondaison pleine d'oiseaux qu'était sa barbe, de la molle colline de ses joues : j'étais là-haut dans l'écume de la haute vague, seul, nu, meurtri, râpé jusqu'au sang par un terrible sel, mais en face d'un large pays neuf, arène de tous les vents, de toutes les pluies, de tous les gels, et le grand cyclone bleu de la liberté se vautrait devant moi dans des étendards de sable." (II,8)

Jean is transported to the great arena of possibilities with this awakening to the worlds that can be created by words. But along with a growing consciousness of the power of the creative gift, mixed with the first stirrings of independence and desire, he feels a painful awareness of being wrenched from the haven of his father's protection. His father's mouth becomes a harbour; symbolic of the healing wisdom that it speaks. And in the end, the need for the comfort of the known is still stronger than the desire for liberty and autonomy. The

voice of the father still holds more authority and influence than the call from outside, as the next passage confirms:

“Mon père retira la pipe de sa bouche. « Pauvre couillon » dit-il.

Il le disait à cet homme blond qui, tout d’un coup, parut cassé et mort comme si on avait fouillé dans son ventre à pleins doigts et retiré le petit mécanisme qui faisait aller les doigts et la langue dans le bel ordre séduisant.” (II,8)

The essential attribute of all of Jean’s mentor/father figures is their authority and their ability as poet/artisan to convey to others the visions of the mind which reveal the heart. As is usual in the early works, the poetic breath-force can take on forms of expression other than the spoken word. Gonzalès, the Mexican neighbour who will also impress and influence the child, seldom speaks, but sings the passionate songs of his native land in his native tongue. Music and speech hold equal powers for the young initiate. Just as Djouan’s graceful movements first spoke of enchantment, without words, and when the words came they flowed like a song, so the discovery of the richness of fine music brings another voice to speak of adventure, life and its mysteries to *l’imaginaire* of Jean. It is not one, but a pair of older men, the musicians Décidément and Madame-la-Reine, who early on bring this important gift to enrich his world.

Jean is initiated into the mysterious language of music when he is in the attic room of the house, in the place where he climbs “à la rencontre du soleil.” (II,37 Here he can also make use of the strange figures that mildew has traced on the walls - the north wall holds a grey/green shadow, and this shadow becomes the apprentice artist’s first blank canvas on which he learns to recreate the surrounding world:

“Je sentais mon regard qui entraît de plus et plus profond dans l’ombre. C’étaient comme des épaisseurs et des épaisseurs de ciel qu’il fallait traverser avant d’atteindre le pays. Peu à peu j’arrivais à un endroit où l’ombre s’éclaircissait, une sorte d’aurore montait le long du mur du nord, et je voyais « la dame. »”(II,38)

The <sup>dimension</sup> that Jean arrives in as he sees the lady of the wall, is the same place that Ulysses is transported to by the words of Archias in Giono’s first novel: “le monde fantastique qui vit derrière l’air brillant.”(I,17) It is the world that lies beyond mere reason – the domain of beauty, pleasure, pity and terror – that he instinctively reaches for, and the lady of the wall is one of its myriad inhabitants, selected by his subconscious mind to seductively

invite him in. Giono calls the imaginary universe where he feels that he naturally belongs, “une patrie”(II,21), and describes a separate land with its own distinct geography:

“Tout ce qui touchait les au-delà de l’air, je m’en sentais intimement amoureux comme d’une patrie, comme d’un pays jadis habité et bien-aimé dont j’étais exilé mais vivant encore tout entier en moi avec ses lacis de chemins, ses grands fleuves étendus à plat sur la terre comme des arbres aux longs rameaux et le moutonnement houleux d’écumantes collines où je connaissais tous les sillages.” (II, 21).

Under the fixed, green gaze of the face, Jean longs so much for it to become more than a stain on the stone that after a time of silent waiting a living form seems to dazzle his eyes. There is more here than just the projection of feelings born from the stirrings of adolescent desire. Jean has, for the first time, consciously brought to bear all the strength of his imagination – what he himself identifies as his “forces secrètes”(II,39). The emerging poet is becoming aware of how he can use his demiurgic powers as a diversion. Like Ulysses, he has come to the point of realisation that he can control the creative game:

“Certes, à partir de moi, l’émotion de son regard s’en allait à travers ma tête en des jaillissements que je commandais seul, qui fusaient vers le vent ou vers le pas mystérieux dans l’épaisseur des murs.” (II,38)

The moment of epiphany arrives when Jean holds the visual image of the the lady before his eyes as, simultaneously, the first strains he has ever heard from a flute reach his ears. As the sense impressions received by the eye and the ear come together it appears to him that the brick “mouth”, the blood red patch where the wall has been eaten away, begins to speak. Later, Jean can recall the tune of the flute at will, merely by thinking of the emotions aroused in him by the lady in green. When he does so, he is again immediately conscious of being the channel of a creative force: “J’étais comme un qui parle non pas par sa voix et par sa tête mais qui n’est plus que l’instrument de toutes les forces cachées.” (II,44)

The young man is only one of the agents and mediums through which such hidden forces seek to speak in order to restructure the world. Through the wall to the father’s workroom, in the adjacent crumbling house which is peopled by transients, is the large room which is home to the two musicians, Décidément and Madame-la-Reine. The magic of their music can transform the very space that they inhabit. When Jean first enters their room, it is so vast, high and densely shadowed that the daylight can reach only to the very middle, where it remains as a solid entity devoid of life and warmth: “comme un petit bloc de glace.” (II,42)

But once the musicians begin to weave their musical tales the space is warmed and enriched. Not only the block of light, but everything else around the listening boy melts away as he is transported to a place where nothing exists beyond the joy of sound.

Giono depicts the power within this creative force as being so potent that from the time of the arrival of Décidément and Madame-le-Reine, the setting of Jean's entire world begins to undergo a change. The rooms occupied by the tenants of Jean's quarter, all have their only windows opening onto a central square, a courtyard where sheep are often lodged. In *Le grand troupeau*, Giono uses the image of a huge flock of sheep (driven down from the high pastures of fresh herbs and rains, into the heat, dust and confinement of the town), to symbolise the body of young men herded together as soldiers and leaving for the slaughterhouse of Verdun, in World War I. In *Jean le Bleu*, the sheep court is a dark, confined space which concentrates and reflects the prison of poverty and impotence that holds the humans in the surrounding houses, whom Jean calls "nos gens." (II,151) When seen from the windows of the houses that face onto it, a scrap of pure sky covers the top of the courtyard like a flat stone. Acting like a cork in a bottle, this sky-stone contains the misery within, but as a revealed fragment of the elevated, blue expanse above, it also offers a glimpse of possible escape via the dream. Down below, in the depths, are the sheep. Brought in from the high freedom of the mountains to await the butcher, they lie stretched out motionless on straw blackened by their dung, in helpless, dumb submission to reality.

But from the arrival into this world of the music of great composers, played on the violin and the flute, the face of the sheep-court becomes transformed. Despite all the enduring material poverty it is a growing awareness of the gift of a creative imagination, and an increased ability to make use of this gift, that are responsible for Jean's changed perception:

Au fond de son malheur naquit un bel enthousiasme, et, malgré ses mauvaises dents et sa laide bouche, elle porta à travers les jours un sourire extasié et un air de bonheur. C'était comme un amour caché qu'elle avait, et elle s'en contenait en elle-même. (II,50)

The young poet already holds a fervent belief in the power of the creative process to transform the world

However fictionalised its depiction in *Jean le Bleu*, the basic experience of Giono's childhood laid the foundation for the strong social conscience that is evident in all his writing. In the author's eyes, to battle for relief from the reality of the human condition by way of the dream, in all its forms, appears to be not an option but essential for survival. At this early

stage of Giono's work there appears to be little complexity to the affair. As seen from the unsophisticated perspective of the young Jean, the battle lines are clearly drawn and the enemy easily identified. All the people of the sheep-court, the disinherited, who are defined as "les nôtres" (passim.) or very explicitly in one case as "nos gens de « dessous les cloches », les habitants de la cour aux moutons, les clients du *Tonneau*" (II,151), form a unit in *Jean le Bleu*. The solidarity of this group confronts the egoism, insularity and destructive materialism of the inhabitants of the more affluent part of the town, which in this novel happens to be Manosque, but which from Giono's perspective would include any urban centre anywhere. In a similar way to that in which the small human community of the Bastides must unite against the opposing forces of nature in *Colline*, the author makes it clear that, in order to survive, "nos gens" must remain united as a community against the physical, mental and spiritual oppression generated by a life of poverty, the imbalance in society and the desecration of nature brought about by the selfishness of humans.

Giono's perception that the bourgeoisie are greedy, with more than their share of the pie, is made evident through their corpulence. When the anarchist wishes to disguise himself as a bourgeois to escape to Switzerland he makes himself "un beau ventre rond, à plein gilet." (II,30) When the two musicians are summoned to play for a rich lady of rank from Spain and take Jean with them to the grand house, they find an imperious woman, "grasse et lourde" (II,52). It is soon apparent that the materialism of the rich offers them little real comfort, but only makes them mean and miserable. Their world, as represented by the Spanish woman's domicile, is an isolated and bleak place: solid, dark and substantial. The images are drawn in very concrete terms. The great house is "corsetée de grilles de fer", the corridor is "comme une gouffre et tout noir" (II,51/2), the main room poorly lit. The picture is one of spiritual poverty and a lack of freedom for the soul. By contrast, Madame-la-Reine faces the woman to sing Bach. He presents his song as a challenge, as if: "tous les habitants de notre pauvre cour de moutons gémissaient." (II,54) The voice is no longer the imprisoned voice of the oppressed, but is described as: "la pleine voix libre et pure". (II,45) It rises effortlessly from the inner spirit, born of pain but joyfully transcending and transforming it into something of great beauty.

The rich lady is musically educated but she is not one of "les nôtres". She is not one of those who has a natural, instinctive passion for the games or the creative lies which challenge the ordinary. She is trapped in the petty realism of those "qui sont plus petits que mesure" (II,153) as Madame-la-Reine says of others elsewhere. The passage which perhaps most



clearly portrays the division which Giono elects to make between those who have a passionate heart for the voice of the dream, and those whose “musical appreciation” is merely a form of etiquette, is the conversation during Jean’s music lesson, where Décidément imagines Bach (physically elevated as befits his spiritual superiority) seated at the organ to play for an audience which is assembled below:

“Tu le vois, lui, là-haut, aux orgues de la porte. Il joue ça. Dessous, Madame la bouchère salue Madame la Préfète, Madame la Préfète salue Madame l’électeur influent, et le curé compte la quête.” (II,46)

Yet the community of people who live in the poor area of Manosque, beneath the bells, seem themselves to be divided into two groups. There are the helpless prisoners of reality – desperate, and trapped by their circumstances – who remain shut up in their misery, seemingly devoid of the transcendent gift of hope that is born from creativity. They are typified by those whom the compassionate Father attends to as they lie ill, sequestered in their squalor, and also by the view at the closed fourth window of the sheep court where one can glimpse the mysterious fish-bowl world of the fat woman who is without age or colour, whose face is nothing more than an amorphous white shape swimming in “l’ombre glauque de la chambre like un poisson triste.” (II,48)

Then there are those who also live in material poverty within the same cramped area of town, but who are open to the healing power of the imagination. These are lovers of the transcendent, transforming, creative lie, members of what seems to be an élite group in the author’s eyes. They are the composite personalities – formed by the skill and mind of the adult writer from actual characters and remembered fragments of a vivid juvenile imagination – that Giono depicts as having had the most influence on his personal development. Through them, he makes evident once again the association in his mind with those influenced by the force of nature and those who have an ability to dream. They are of his race – children of Pan – and this select group are physically marked out by some aspect in their appearance, as if the hope that they hold within is the very thing that makes the life-force course through their veins. The girl on the stairs with the light step, asks Jean to whistle a tune for her: “on voyait qu’elle en avait vraiment bien envie. Elle suçait ses lèvres du bout de sa langue et ses yeux eurent le petit battement comme un oiseau qui s’envole.” (II,68) She carries a scent of musk, her face is starkly powdered white and her painted lips are like a raw wound, but she has “une caresse douce et chaude, bonne.” (II,67/8) And Jean recognises somewhere within his latent sexuality that she has “des mains savantes.” (II,68) that bring the promise of another

form of release. She can transform Jean's cravat from the fat snail of the secret-knot-that-will-never-come-undone – which has been tightly tied by the protective hands of one of his mother's workers to keep his throat from the cold air – into two fine, light butterfly wings.

Among other children of Pan, the exotic and influential Gonzales stands out as if seemingly formed from the flat deserts of his native land by the caress of a strange wind. His lack of speech is revealed in the aridity of his face: “un immense visage de sable nu” (II,131) Under the nose which is like an old worn dune, is the bed of the mouth where :“l'eau n'avait dû passer qu'une fois ou deux.”(II,131) Gonzalès will break hearts with his passion before he marries the nubile Clara – a free spirit who is likened to a mare from the high pastures. Madame la Reine has fingers that perch along the wooden shaft of his flute like birds and Décidément smells of overripe apple and old leather. When Jean's father changes his shirt, Jean can see his chest:“entoisonné d'un poil de bélier depuis le cou jusqu'à ventre ”(II,57); and whenever he speaks of the country and of the oak trees to be found there, he has a trembling and visible joy within him. And that other facet of the father/mentor/alter-ego figure, the character of the poet Odripano, who will appear at a crucial point in the adolescent Jean's development, is in appearance the very incarnation of a benevolent Pan. His body is as straight as a yew tree, his white hair like wool, and on each side of his forehead are two beautiful round mirrors of skin, smooth and polished and reflecting light. They appear like:“les cornes blondes des jeunes beliers.” (II,155)

Jean will leave behind all the figures of influence on his childhood, when he departs for the country town of Corbières to convalesce from an illness and enters what will be the crucial summer of his season of development as an apprentice poet. Two important figures will continue the line of mentors to further his education. The first is the direct father substitute, le Père Massot, a man who knows the secrets of the land and who provides Jean with the first opportunity for a prolonged and intense association with the natural world. The liberation of the latent creativity within the young poet is made explicit by the description of his feelings on arrival at Corbières.

“Le scellement était bien brisé, on avait déchiré le sceau et ouvert les grandes portes, et déjà il n'y avait plus de portes, le seuil était dépassé, j'étais dans la vaste patrie des vents.”(II,73)

Christian Morzewski has produced a study which compares the initiation of Jean le Bleu into the vocation of spiritual “healer” (in this instance, the mantle of poet, which will be

passed on after his return from the country) with various mythic models, and with the traditional rites of the initiation of the healer into various world societies. He notes that even before the series of suicides which will take place after arrival at Corbières, the voyage there already has symbols of a little ritual death which the child must cross in order to be reborn.<sup>1</sup> The only basic elements still known of the secrets of the Eleusinian Mysteries, Morzewski informs us, took some form of a journey through shadows, accompanied by certain apparitions (presumably products of the imagination), with a sudden penetration into a brightly lit space. Jean travels in the advancing evening to a destination symbolically situated at altitude, where there is a gorse fire alight on the village square and houses full of lamplight. This crossing of the shadows will be echoed in *Le Chant du monde* when Antonio and Matelot move through the gorges from the everyday territory of the lowlands to enter the high, mysterious and fictitious territory known as Rebeillard land. The village of Corbières, elevated and cradled in the mountains, is also largely an imaginary product of the adult memory: a retreat for the dreamer, a place where the child will have the ultimate revelation of universal sensuality, which allows him to establish an essential communion with the world. It presents another example of Giono's low/high, town/country opposition. Corbières is a place of health and healing for its inhabitants, when compared with the miserable lifestyle available to those who dwell beneath the bells of Manosque. But as Robert Ricatte points out in his "Notice", *le mal* can invade the fields just as well as the town.<sup>2</sup> The difference lies in the way resistance to it is organised. Unlike the selfishness found in the town, in the country those in authority present a united front against trouble and engage in collective action in their effort to disperse it. The difference is one of human attitudes: a prevailing spirit of generosity allows for healing and restoration in the face of catastrophic events.

The first, and most essential thing that the apprentice poet must learn in his new surroundings is that he can use his creative gifts to enchant the world of another. For this reason, Giono gives the young Jean a companion at play, Anne, who also belongs among the children of Pan. Anne knows how to "cligner de l'œil" (II,74) in the manner which enables her to dissolve reality, in order to see a great river from beyond the seas in the place of a trickling stream. "Mais c'est moi qui le lui avais appris" (II,74) Jean tells us. There is a conscious entering into imaginative play through naming things, thereby affirming the power inherent within words, as the two children move into the land of fiction hand in hand. For

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Morzewski, *La lampe et la plaie. Le mythe du guérisseur dans Jean le Bleu de Giono*, pp.92-93

<sup>2</sup> Robert Ricatte, Notice, p.1212

example, when they play in the fig tree which Jean has named “le serpent”, the young poet tells Anne: “Les branches du figuier sont comme un grand serpent en colère, et pourtant, il fait la corbeille pour les petits enfants.” (II,74) The poet speaks new things into being – once Jean has named the tree, it becomes, for both of them, a different entity. Coiled around on themselves, the branches also form the image of *Ouroboros*, the mythical serpent, symbol of unity within the cyclical life force. The fig tree is another realm of escape and safe adventure: it represents all the seething energy and fecundity of the world, which will however safely cradle those with the attitude of the child. Like Ulysses at the end of *Naissance de l’Odyssée*, the children play the game of the lost boat with a tiny piece of wood, in the stream beneath the safety of the protective tree, inventing fantastic story-book adventures for their imaginary passengers and recomposing the entire world into fiction for their own pleasure.

In *Jean le Bleu* there is no reality in the form of Telemachus behind the trees waiting to strike at the children, and to destroy the dream, but there is unfolding time, which relentlessly advances their destiny. The role of Jean’s mentor passes to yet another. L’homme noir comes to tutor the boy, and in this version of Giono’s childhood is the first to introduce him to certain pivotal texts. He has sent a parcel for Jean, tied with string. Inside: “Il y avait *L’Odyssée*, Hésiode, un petit Virgile en deux volumes et une bible toute noire.” (II,84) Says Jaques Le Gall :

“...l’initiation à la lecture — car il s’agit ici d’une véritable initiation — est fondamentalement associée à l’amour, à la mort et au sacré, le tout sous le regard de deux figures contrastées du Père.”<sup>1</sup>

And :“ ... la voix du tuteur initie à la *science du texte* en même temps qu’au mystère du *ça*, autrement dit du sexe. [...] L’homme noir est un spécialiste à la fois du Texte et de la Femme ”<sup>2</sup>

After his return from facing the horrors of World War One, Giono wrote a passage describing what was essentially a healing experience for him. While reading the *Odyssey*, lying in the hills above Manosque, he felt himself to be the intermediary for an intense interchange between the book and the surrounding countryside as the words and the world merged into one. This experience seems to have had the effect of psychologically

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Le Gall, “L’enfance de l’art”, in *Giono dans sa Culture*, p.16

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.18

reintegrating him. The efficacy of literature as a salve for the wounds sustained by his mind and soul at this time, was probably the main reason for Giono's fervent and ongoing faith in the power of the word to heal. In *Jean le Bleu*, he incorporates this dream experience into memories drawn from his early adolescence, so that as the days enter into the intense height of summer the young Jean reads the the *Iliad* in the fields of ripened wheat with all the noise and activity of the harvest going on around him. Fiction and reality are conjoined for him as the peasants battle the heat and exhaustion to get the harvest in.

“Cette bataille, ce corps à corps danseur qui faisait balancer les gros poings comme des floquets de fouet, ces épieux, ces piques, ces flèches, ces sabres, ces hurlements, ces fuites et ces retours, et les robes de femme qui flottaient vers les gerbes étendues : j'étais dans L'Iliade rousse.”(II, 95)

The continuity of the book and the countryside enable the young reader to be within both spaces at the same time; to be physically part of the actuality of a land which still holds remnants of the geography and traditions which belong to the ancient world of Homer, at the same time as his mind has entered the fictional space which imaginatively evokes that same world. All boundaries of time and space are abolished in a complete sense of “being”. This is one of those moments which Giono regards as the the peak of ecstasy, where body, mind and spirit are completely integrated with the living world.

The fact that the countryside loses its vitality and its idyllic countenance as winter advances is more than just seasonal: it marks the beginning of disillusionment, an invasion of the dream by reality, which is mirrored in an alteration of the young Jean's countenance. “Il m'était venu une sorte de visage pointu et lunaire, un masque gris de sable et de plâtre, une peau morte.” (II,125) The death mask shows the passing of the joyous freedom of the child. The commencement of maturity has brought an awareness to the boy of his developing sexuality and of his own mortality: the cold reality of his position in the cosmos as a member of the human race.

“Je n'étais déjà plus dans le monde des enfants mais je pesais mon poids sur la terre et le ciel ne me laissait plus flotter comme un duvet léger du buisson maternel, mais il pesait sur moi déjà de tout son poids pour me forcer au chemin.” (II,480)

On his return from Corbières, at a time when the hard winter has come to Manosque and when many of “les nôtres” have died or have moved on, the haunts of Jean's childhood seem profoundly changed, as he projects his own metamorphosis onto the environment. Everything around him is a little as if “sous la poussière de charbon .”(II,127) But,

importantly, the lady on the wall, as the doorkeeper to the land beyond reality, remains as seductive as before, revealing that the young man is open to hope. It is *le père Jean*, the healer, who articulates the importance of hope. Hope is an essential element to life, but it is also by nature a thing of extraordinary fragility, he informs Jean, because it will be destroyed if one puts one's trust in reason and modern inventions. For Jean's father it is a question of faith in the dream – and he has the degree of faith that can move mountains:

“Avec l'espérance, on arrive à tout. Et les montagnes qu'on fait lever sont de bonnes montagnes en chair et en os, et les arbres y sont chez eux, et les sources y dorment dans des lits de granit propres comme des pièces d'or. Et la force qui les fait marcher n'est pas une force de rouages et de ressorts d'acier. C'est une force de coeur. Ça ne se détraque plus une fois partie.” (II, 128).

The father is both acknowledging his son's future vocation and passing on the mantle of healer. He is speaking of the power of poetry. Mastery of the poetic language will see Jean reborn, able to bring about a reparation of that which is broken or spoiled by helping others to discover a magic dimension which transcends everyday reality. Later, Jean's father will tell him: “Si, quand tu seras un homme, tu connais ces deux choses, la poésie et la science d'éteindre les plaies, alors, tu seras un homme.” (II, 170) Odripano is such a man. He will make an appearance when others seem to have relinquished their creativity – the father is becoming weary and disillusioned because of age and illness, and the influence of the musicians is declining. Of the sexagenarian Odripano, *le père* says: “S'il peut rester jeune au milieu de nous, c'est parce qu'il est poète.” (II, 170)

It is immediately after the death of the musician, Décidément, that Odripano begins to lead the apprentice poet through what will be the final stages of his induction – acquiring the intricacies of his art at the feet of a master. The character of Odripano is an amalgamation of the father and his substitutes with the many authors from whose books Giono has learned his craft. Through Odripano, Giono carefully sets the stage, preparing for the initiation of a career devoted to upholding the triumph of the dream over the tedium of reality. On the third floor of the old house is an abandoned room where: “l'ombre s'était durcie là-dedans depuis des années et des années.” (II, 154) Odripano the poet, who is a transformer and a bringer of enlightenment, rents it and whitewashes throughout, dispelling the darkness, vermin and years of dreariness so that the ceiling and walls of the room become: “crèmeux et bleutés comme une belle profondeur de lait.” (II, 156). Jean makes a regular pilgrimage to this temple of stories. The experience of listening to the tales of the poet is akin to a religious

one, as through the power of words Odripano transfigures the young man's world. Whenever Jean leaves the room he is such a state of rapture that he must carefully touch the ground to ensure that it is still there beneath his feet.

The stories that Odripano tells are those of a fictional childhood through which he reinvents himself: his own *Jean le Bleu*. At first the room holds echoes for Jean of his initiation into music by the musicians, when a similar space had become warmed and enchanted by sound. But the once childish joy to be found in the harmony of sounds has now developed a more intense and specific purpose. Music must be replaced by the poetic word, in order for the young man to discover his true vocation and to master the skills necessary to practise it. When Odripano begins to talk, his voice sounds out alone in the sparsely decorated room but after a little while the air becomes "warmed" as the spoken words take on a cadence and a rhythm of their own: "l'écho des murs se mettait à jouer et il y avait trois ou quatre paroles mélangées." (II,157) Beneath the discourse a drum begins its steady beat, which must be the rhythm of Jean's excited heart filling his ears. Gradually the space becomes crowded with the "voix diverses of échos coupés et réfléchis and sons en retard" (II,157), which arrive at the ear after bouncing off the luminous walls. The skill of the speaker and the receptivity of the listening mind come together as one, in a moment of spiritual ecstasy, where the complex rhythms, counterpoint and harmony of the voices form a word-symphony which whirls in Jean's head like a great flock of birds. The story-teller and his listener are now in conversation with "les habitants du mystère." (II,157) Odripano has led Jean beyond an appreciation of literature, to that point which for Giono exists on a higher plane – the mysterious *atelier* of the imaginative mind, where all the characters and dimensions of his future work are waiting to be born.

**Conclusion:** In this chapter, through an examination of Giono's early fiction and the many instances which portray his primary characters as being those who retain a "childlike" openness to life, we have established the type of personality that the author openly privileges, and the fact that he makes a clear division between two basic types within the human race. In keeping with the author's dream of a state of universal harmony, as seen through his promotion of the agency of the artist/healer in these works, one can detect a genuine desire for all humans to be converted to a state of spiritual wellness through a return to a childlike state of openness, simplicity and imaginative abandonment; but we can also detect a tone of resignation along with a certain moral elitism in Giono's anarchic attitudes in the face of

social expectations and inequalities and in his contempt for the preoccupations of the bourgeoisie.

We have also seen that all these works have, to one degree or another, an autobiographical element and that together they contribute to the picture of the development of the artist/poet during the formative years that lead up to the induction of the young adult as spiritual healer. A comparison between two incarnations of the young Jean: one in the very rudimentary stages of his creative career the other in an evolved version known as Angelo, capable at a tender age of fabricating with skill and by choice, have allowed us to glimpse the development in the complexity and intricacy of the dream world that is to come beyond these first works.

An overall progression from instinctive child to apprentice poet can be followed through the primary work, *Jean le Bleu*, in a cycle which mirrors the seasons of nature. This phase of learning – which takes the boy from an early state of joyful enthusiasm, through a period of growth and expansion, to the death of innocence in disillusionment – is a necessary one for the young man in order for him to acquire a sense of his destiny and his social responsibility. Hope can only be embraced by looking into the face of despair. Regeneration is achieved through the influence of the composite mentor, Odripano, representative of all the many and diverse influences responsible for educating and inspiring the young man and for teaching him how to expunge reality with the dream.



## Chapter Four – Darkness and light

*Voilà le jour; il est exactement soudé à la nuit. Il recommence, éternellement, comme un serpent qui se mord la queue. (Présentation de Pan ; I, 777)*

**Introduction:** In the earliest novels, we have discerned the constant presence of a world of dreams and of possibilities which runs parallel to that of perceived reality. While the realms that comprise this dream dimension are all products of the imaginative mind, they have been represented by the author in different ways. *Naissance de l'Odyssée* and the PAN cycle suggested some mysterious and powerful world beyond: in the first instance a domain of gods or super beings, in the second, one of cosmic powers – both worlds being mirrored on earth by the forces of nature. In *Jean le Bleu*, through the metamorphosis of the character of Jean, the artist/author assumed formal responsibility as the generative force which shapes these realms<sup>1</sup>, from now on realised as the “territoire[s] intérieur[s]”<sup>2</sup> of the dream where the creative spirit engages with the ecstasies and agonies of the external world. In this chapter, while making reference to some of the books already studied and to other (later) works, we will generally focus the discussion on a close consideration of the novel *Le Chant du monde* which takes a major step on the continuum which moves Giono's work from a type of concrete reality towards an openly fictional world which is prominently a celebration of the author's power of invention. Although in many ways a further development of the primitive world of Giono's earliest novels, the book marks a movement towards a greater creative freedom and an enlarged vision in his work. In its overall general direction – a movement from obscurity to light – we find a full flowering of the compensatory fictional world arising from the dream, which has its genesis in the early life experience of the poet/creator, Jean le Bleu.

Ocurring on several different levels throughout the novel is a counterbalancing of various positive and negative themes – which can be more figuratively described in terms of clarity and obscurity or of light and darkness – that are used within this particular novel to form part of the overall movement towards a state of illumination. In examining Giono's use of the concepts of darkness and light we will come across a number of the author's customary

<sup>1</sup> In much the same way as Ulysses came to do, eventually, when he decided to make use of his gift *sciemment* – another example of the foundational importance of *Naissance*, which sketched the future direction of Giono's early novels.

<sup>2</sup> From notes towards the unfinished *Au Territoire du Piémont*, (II, 1240)

binary oppositions. Broadly speaking, these oppositions (generally so closely associated as to be intertwined) encompass a comparison of : blindness versus sight; town versus country; and despair versus hope. By using the redemptive power of words to bring unification, clarity of vision and hope, the author's main characters overcome the human problems of separation and miscommunication which give rise to loneliness, confusion and general despair. This process of holistic healing is, however, completely dependent upon the individual's ability to perceive the "reality" of that visionary realm which exists in the dimension formed by the imagination when it takes its inspiration from the natural world.

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The usefulness of selecting *Le Chant du monde* as the main tool with which to examine the author's concern with human perception, lies in the fact that almost all the key scenes take place in some sort of obscurity, or, by way of contrast, in light which is intense or localised. The diurnal and nocturnal patterns of this work are of particular interest, because, unusually, the nights are given as much importance as the days. The two alternate regularly in the first and third parts of the novel where there is a continuous flow of events. It is one of Giono's constant themes that the night reveals those things that are hidden by the light of day. The dissolution of the visible which Giono achieves through different means at different times throughout the body of his work, allows a heightened appreciation of the customarily unobserved aspects or hidden secrets of the surrounding universe, as the other senses come into full play. Paradoxically, through contrast, this throws an emphasis onto colour, light, shadow and movement in what remains, or in what will be gradually revealed, of the visible world. Above all, a veil of darkness provides a refuge which allows free reign to the creative imagination in a manifestation of the author's desire to create harmony between a visible "reality" and an invisible reality; to reconcile the outer world and the inner world of the imaginative mind.

*Le Chant du monde* is set in its own poetic, autonomous universe which initiates a break with previous models by taking Giono's novels for the first time out of the known territory around Manosque that, while modified, has formed the arena for the preceding works. The outer frame of this imaginary land is formed by the boundaries of a huge valley set on two significant physical levels – high country and low. Even though the tale has an epic dimension, the entire story is contained within this space as if held between two book covers, and the valley itself has been inscribed into the rock by the powerful force of water; synonymous for Giono with *la parole*. The journey to "l'au-delà," which takes place within

the novel, is no longer that of the “voyageur immobile” through the layers of sky to an exterior if largely incorporeal land, but takes the form of a physical quest to an unexplored but well-defined territory, to confront the demons and the dreams and to return enriched and wiser. It is, to put things on another level, a concrete demonstration of the volitional entry into the realm of fiction – the conscious, creative, act of the author that the young Jean was beginning to experiment with in an inchoate form. A romanticisation of the prosaic, which is achieved through a development of the twin skills of true perception and expression.

For the protagonist of the novel, Antonio, the movement from obscurity to light takes the form of a spiritual and psychological journey towards enlightenment, signalling the developing complexity of Giono’s characters. Antonio will undergo a gradual process of humanisation – a more sophisticated version of Panturle’s conversion in *Regain* – through the self-knowledge he acquires in interaction with others, and in particular through finding his soul-mate, Clara. The process again follows the path of an expansion of the imaginative powers whereby, through a symbiotic relationship with the surrounding living landscape and a subjective interpretation of its forces as imagery which is expressed through the medium of the word, reality gradually becomes effaced to be replaced by a fictional world which is controlled by the minds of the two lovers. Even more than in previous novels, the pathway of this development of the inner person is revealed through concrete images which are drawn from the external world, so that all human activity within the work is accompanied, influenced and even choreographed by the moods of nature. Giono explores the subject of liberation through illumination by using the regular cycles of the world as well as through the proliferation of sounds, smells and tactile sensations which are always given a place of importance in the author’s work, but which take on an increased significance here. The novel therefore has a complexity of rhythms, the most marked being the alternation of days and nights and the seasonal patterns which control the natural rhythms as they build towards the release of Spring as part of the overall movement towards light and liberty.

The constant subversion of reality, which is the mainspring of Giono’s writing, requires characters who are either visionaries themselves, or who can be led by others into and through the world that lies beneath the surface. A category has already been established of humans who have the capacity for true perception and whose members can be identified as those who bear the attributes of children of Pan. In the novel *Le Chant du monde*, the question of perception is dealt with explicitly, either through the presence of the physical condition of blindness or through circumstances which simulate it. Sightlessness has always

fascinated Giono and blind characters appear in his work from the start, beginning with the guitarist of *Naissance de l'Odyssée*. Pierre Citron, having questioned Giono about this particular fascination, reports the author as saying that he felt it was his own personal penchant for “la volupté des sens”<sup>1</sup> which was responsible for the attraction. Giono holds to the popular belief that the blind possess: “la sensualité du toucher et de l’ouïe ; ils entendent avec une acuité particulière.”<sup>2</sup> This attitude underlines the fact that, for him, the only truly infirm are the humans of the modern world who have difficulty discerning those things that he holds to be of true value and that can bring a simple joy to life. The author is soon to translate this problem of “mind blindness” to the malaise of the inhabitants of the Grémone plateau, in his next novel, *Que ma joie demeure*.

The simulation of blindness in *Le Chant du monde* is immediate, as Giono begins the novel with a state of visual nothingness; of total darkness. The very first sentence consists of “La nuit.” (II,189) The author selects a small, self-contained patch of trees from one unlit corner of the world on one night in the great stretch of eternity, and uses it as a microcosm, a trace of the unity and harmony of the entire cosmos. The season is autumn and will soon plunge into winter; with the new beginning of spring to come only at the end. The second sentence begins, “Le fleuve”, and so introduces the first character. Like the road that leads into *Jean le Bleu*, the river is described as a living entity from the start; but whereas in that novel, along with sounds and smells, the view from the road ranges over a vast area of several levels with all its sights and colours, here the dark setting precludes any visual description and everything is depicted in close up, lying within range of perception by those human senses other than sight. In this first passage, the personality of the river is evoked through animal imagery which relates to the sensations of touch and sound alone:

“Le fleuve roulait a coups d’épaules à travers la forêt. . . D’un côté l’eau profonde, souple comme du poil de chat; de l’autre côté les hennissements du gué.” (II,189).

The third sentence reveals the name of our protagonist, “Antonio”, and it is Antonio’s perspective that we are being given; an insight into the intimacy of the relationship he has with the river. His character is as fully integrated with nature as a human can be; completely in tune with his instincts, the proof of which is an ability to move around at ease in the darkness of his surroundings, using smell and touch and reading the contours of the land through his unshod feet. Along with his friend Matelot, he demonstrates this facility from the

<sup>1</sup> Giono quoted by Citron. “Notice”, II, p1268

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

moment that the two men set out through the forest to begin their journey, their progression marked by the odours stirred up as they pass. Both navigate by identifying the familiar scents of their territory and the noises of the surrounding night which is alive with activity. The vitality of the universal life force is again expressed in an anthropomorphic image as the author depicts the myriad of minute noises which together make up a wave of background sound, as a “song” which takes the form of “un long souffle sourd, un bruit de gorge, un bruit profond, un long chant monotone dans une bouche ouverte.”(II,194) In the depths of this song Giono isolates individual, tiny sounds of life which are usually imperceptible to human ears, such as the slight pattering of leaves which sound like rats’ feet before they drop from their boughs. The extreme acuity of the selected senses of the two (as yet unseen) men marks them clearly as children of Pan, and once again uses the channel formed by the sensual perception of Giono’s human characters to reveal to the reader the usually undetectable essence of each surrounding life form. The fact that this rich and layered description occurs without the use of any visual imagery at all, first introduces the idea that will recur throughout the novel that it can be the normal sight of human beings that restricts true perception and causes true blindness.

Into this world of darkness, Giono gradually and systematically introduces light. As the light grows, the author uses the device of human sight to begin to establish some concrete form to the immediate surroundings while moving the view from one angle to another. At first the perspective remains with the men – we see as they see. As each, in turn, lights a pipe of tobacco, the flame of the tinder reveals the lower half of their face to the man opposite. This brief glimpse gives the reader the first suggestion of the physical opposition of two types, one incarnating water, the other earth: the fineness of the lips and chin of Antonio the man of the stream and the fleshy, full-blooded lips set in the bushy beard of Matelot, a man of the forest. The visual aspects of the scene gradually assume more importance as sight comes into play, allowing the author to begin to play with patterns of light. The darkness becomes greyer once the men climb above the trees, a red glow rises from Matelot’s huge camp fire in the depths of the forest, an owl “lights up” its eyes. The trunks of trees stand out against the fire’s glow like the bars of a fence so that Antonio is able to study, for the reader’s benefit, the “woodsman’s” gait of the man walking before him, until the climax of the scene when the men enter the camp clearing to be initially blinded by dazzling flames. A young woman seated on the other side of the fire reflects the blaze in intense yellow eyes that burn like those of a beast of the night. As she turns her gaze on the men, the focus shifts directly to her perspective so that we at last see the men fully revealed as authentic children of Pan.

While this slow unveiling is a miniature reflection of the overall pattern found throughout the novel of the gradual progression from obscurity towards clarity (interrupted by a period of winter stagnancy), which will bring enlightenment, there is another aspect to this fondness for gradually disclosing the visible, material, form of things to the senses. It is the other side of Giono's custom of embodying all abstract concepts in concrete images. Here, in a sort of reversal of that process, by taking matter and making it initially formless, he builds a portrait piece by piece, bringing it gradually to a full-bodied roundness. Once again, this is in part a manifestation of the writer's enjoyment of the role of creator. It is the same joy that he finds in taking a fragment of reality and conjuring from it a whole new world, or in remodelling the countryside of his birth that he knows so well. Such a method of systematic disclosure, when it occurs in Giono's novels, is nearly always perceived through the senses of one or more of the other major characters, so it is also a method of demonstrating the degree of sensitivity and the heightened perception of the one who observes, interprets and records the unveiling (here one could also include the author himself as the one who watches, and his reader). As well, it provides the opportunity for a first impression which will convey an essential truth about the newcomer. Giono is particularly fond of using variations on this technique as a method of introducing into a work a new character who will have a decided impact on the lives of other humans. It is worth briefly examining some selected instances of the use of this device (including one from *Le Chant*), which extends across both "manners" of his work but evolves between them.

The scene is most often nocturnal, allowing for the dramatic play of shadow and light in the process of unveiling and adding a suggestion of fantasy to the atmosphere. The subject is usually lit, initially, by some form of localised light which then expands to encompass the whole person, while the one who watches is almost always unobserved. Exactly such a scene is found in *Un de Baumugnes* when Albin describes his first glimpse of Angèle as she enters from the darkness outside, into the shop he is watching:

"C'était une fille : deux sauts de pigeon, et la voilà dans la boutique. Je la voyais de côté : son nez et sa bouche, c'était juste devant la lumière, et c'était net, et c'était beau [...]. Alors, c'est la lune qui lui tape en plein dessus, du pied au cheveu, et c'est elle que je vois, entière, avec ses jambes et son doux ventre et ses deux seins pleins que le corsage tenait, et sa belle tête aux tresses tortillées." (I,225)

In the works of the first manner, as in this case, the features of the person as they are gradually revealed are described in terms which reinforce the interdependence of humans and

nature. The young man watching Angèle is instinctively aware of the vitality and honest strength contained within her nubile form: of her potential as a mother. Robert Webster<sup>1</sup> notes the close linking of Angèle with the moon, which is traditionally associated with fertility and maternity.

In the same vein, in *Le Chant du monde* Antonio and Matelot will first come upon Clara hidden from sight in a valley, which is described as “noire d’arbres et de nuit” (II,215), and in the throes of childbirth. Drawn by the sound of her gasps and cries they must rely entirely on sound to locate her. The momentary glimpse afforded by a flare that Matelot lights, reveals her lying on her back on the earth. The earth-mother symbolism of Clara’s character is immediately and obviously established. Soon after, Antonio helps to wash the woman and warm her by rubbing her with brandy. Thus, he gradually comes to truly “see” her through touch, and he sees her in terms of the earth:

“Toutes les vallées, tous les plis, toutes les douces collines de ce corps, il les sentait dans sa main, elles entraient dans lui, elles se marquaient dans sa chair à lui à mesure qu’il les touchait avec leurs profondeurs et leurs gonflements “. (II, 220)

His love for Clara is immediate and established by this tactile contact with her; a contact which seems to impart a deep knowledge of her through something akin to osmosis.

Another nocturnal meeting, in natural surroundings, occurs in the overture of *Que ma joie demeure*. Jourdan, waiting in hope for the coming of a man with a “cœur bien verdoyant” (II,420) to cure the community’s malaise, feels the presence of Bobi behind him. Despite the unusual brightness of the night, he cannot see the new arrival’s face, but we know from a script loaded with various sensory information that the anticipated healer has arrived. The impression is of a man who is earthed in the natural world: “un homme pose sur le large du plateau Grémone avec la stature et la lenteur d’un arbre.” (II,425)

As our study involves the progressive development throughout the pre-war novels of a fictional universe which will only reach its full potential within the minds of the protagonists of later novels, it is worth digressing here to note Giono’s continued use of a form of this protracted revelation in the post-war novels. There, in a world of social sophistication and culture, time and history begin to exist and the vocabulary belongs to the everyday life of the nineteenth century. As the characters peopling the novels become more psychologically

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<sup>1</sup> R. Webster, *Jean Giono : A study of four primitive novels*. p.96

complex, the process of the gradual unveiling of a character through the eyes or ears of another, will display a definite subjectivity. There will be, however, still the same desire for, and movement towards, illumination and expansion: a re-awakening through the discovery of another who could change the fabric of life by bringing happiness and purpose which is now to be understood as banishing *ennui*. So, in *Mort d'un personnage*, when Angelo the boy first meets his charismatic grandmother beneath a street lamp, although her face remains unlit in the night all the mystery and dignity of Pauline de Théus that he will come to esteem are captured in his adult recollection of this time, portrayed through the play of shadow and light on her form. (IV, 152) In *Pour saluer Melville*, when from overheard snatches of conversation and the token of a small hand through a coach window Herman visualises a whole persona for the unseen Adelina, her subsequent physical unveiling through his eyes will be typically gradual – a glimpse here, an opportune glance there. It will be not until the next morning, when she appears in full daylight, that he will see in the form of Adelina all the beauty and sensitivity that he had anticipated from the sound of a voice.(III,45) And in a similar way, Angelo will create a mental portrait of the unseen young Pauline in *Angelo*, on the evening when he first breathes in the beautiful trace of an balsamic perfume which lingers in the chateau of La Valette. (IV,63) This perfume, he believes, offers a glimpse into what must be all the richness of the reality of the young woman's life.

The forest setting that Giono has used in a more primitive manner to conceal and then gradually reveal the early protagonists of *Le Chant du monde*, forms part of the southern portion of a large valley with three distinct geographical areas: the plains where the men live their simple, physical existence in semi-solitude; the narrow gorges which must be travelled to make the transition from lowland to high which constitutes a rite of passage; and the mysterious, transmutable Rebeillard country. These areas will have a marked sociological and psychological significance for the characters.

While the lowland space that delineates home for the men is as chimerical and subjectively perceived as the others in the novel (unusually for Giono, this low area is depicted in positive terms), it is the domain in which they live out their daily lives and is therefore used by the author to represent the world of everyday reality. The most striking aspect of these characters, in the early stages of the novel, is their total integration into the particular area of the plain which forms their immediate environment. Both live off the fruit of the land in islands of near isolation and apart from their mutual friendship seem to have little contact with others. Matelot seems to have actively sought such isolation as he tells



Antonio why he came to live in the forest: “Ça vient de cette habitude de bateau. [the cocoon in the middle of “le large”] J’aime pas la plaine, j’aime pas la montagne: j’aime cette forêt loin de tout. Ça sent le bois, ça crie et ça grince.” (II,256) Antonio, however, along with his complete understanding of the living world, can operate in a social dimension through his ability to communicate through song. From the start, we see that Giono has given him the potential to be an intermediary and interpreter between the natural world and the world of humans. In Giono’s terms he is an instinctive poet, embodying the song of the world. His reputation is such that it has reached even to the Rebeillard country, and he is known throughout the realm as “bouche d’or”. But, in his still unenlightened state, he uses this ability to charm and enchant, selfishly, in order to meet his own physical needs. He calls to the village girls with a song which mesmerises, but with a “voix de bête” (II,201), and comes noiselessly out of the night to enter those houses in the villages where the women have carefully oiled the locks. The scars he bears on his body from his contact with the ambushing men of the villages are the concrete evidence of his social isolation. “Il avait ses trois cicatrices: un coup de couteau, une morsure d’homme, un coup de serpe qui lui avait ouvert la poitrine. Cette fois-là, il s’était réveillé à la côte, avec de l’eau jusqu’au ventre.” (II,203) In the paradoxical manner that we have discussed in the chapter on PAN, Giono seems again to concede that, in practice, to be so completely at one with the natural world, in a continued form of isolation, leads to the extinction of much of what it means to be specifically human.

From the level area of the plains, where time and energy is mainly employed in providing the basic human necessities for daily living, one can only glimpse the Rebeillard country towards the north. Rebeillard is one of Giono’s romanticised countries of “derrière l’air”: it remains clouded and obscure, its secrets invisible to those who watch from the land of reality. But it has the fascinating and disquieting aspect of a great brooding beast; between the mountains of the north and the hills which surround the gateway to the south, lies an area shrouded in a blue vapour which is described as “la fumée et la respiration du grand pays.” (II,206).

On their quest northwards towards this high country, the two travellers must enter through the passageway of misty, straight, narrow gorges. As soon as they move into this silent pass they become separated from one another within a deep stifling fog where neither eyes nor ears are of use and navigation must be through touch alone. Giono once more simulates the condition of blindness through an absence of light, but this time he has isolated Antonio and situated him in completely unknown territory. The journey becomes an initiation process for

the young man, a form of preparation which will later enable him to reach some understanding of blind Clara's perspective on the world. Antonio must remove his shoes in order to feel the quality of the ground and check for ditches and banks<sup>1</sup> until the faint noises from a distant village become audible, signalling by this return of sound that he has passed through the gorges and into Rebeillard land. The author now uses the device of the darkness of night falling to continue to deprive Antonio of sight. He moves his character forward tentatively step by step, in a place where nothing touches the eyes except a night which is depicted as "plate et froide comme de la pierre" (II,213). The first sensory impressions that the protagonist receives of the new territory that he has ventured into, arrive through the soles of his feet. It is characteristic of Giono's approach that a forewarning of trouble ahead in this alien land should take the form of an abstract feeling, received from a concrete source, conveyed through the senses and expressed in a metaphorical image. Antonio experiences the negative sensations of a wintry earth which has the feel of "la viande d'une bête morte." (II,213) Then, with the sudden illumination that signals arrival to the initiate, the open country lights up before him. The new world that is revealed is slightly eerie and fantastic, expanding outwards, suggesting the threat and the promise of the unknown:

Au-dessus du brouillard la lune s'était élevée. Une colline dressa son dos et sa toison de pins. Un labour fumait. Des ronces nues avec des gouttes d'eau allumées à toutes les griffes luisaient dans les haies. Un déroulement de collines et de bois, de bosquets noirs et de champs clairs s'élargit lentement jusqu'à tenir tout le large de l'horizon. (II, 213)

Giono's has preceded Antonio's journey with a prior description of the Rebeillard country as a sunlit scene of bright light, colour and activity. Beyond providing the contrast of a daylight scene to compare with one of the night, this earlier passage reveals something of Giono's fascination with the prospect of expressing ubiquity and simultaneity through the written word; aspects of writing which he will later explore in depth in *Noé*. In this respect, Christophe Pradeau is one among several critics who have noted Giono's marked fondness for the work of the Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel the elder, and cites several examples from Giono's journals<sup>2</sup> where the author himself mentions his attempts to capture in words something of the fullness of vision of the panoramic format that enables the painter to bring everything under one gaze. There is a passage, near to the end of *Jean le Bleu*, where Giono has *le père* describe at length to the young Jean the detail within the painting in which

<sup>1</sup> In *Mort d'un Personnage*, Giono has one of his characters say: "Savez-vous ce que c'est qu'un aveugle? C'est un être qui voit avec ses pieds." (III,175)

<sup>2</sup> Christophe Pradeau, *Jean Giono*, p.67

Breugel depicts the fall of Icarus. In this instance, Giono freely uses the painter's landscape in exactly the same way as he appears to have always used the living landscape around him, merely as a springboard for his own imaginative creation. The inventive description of the Breugel scene as it is found within the novel, ranges over several pages, from which the following is extracted:

“Il y avait d’abord, devant, un homme gigantesque [...], derrière lui, imagine tout un grand pays comme celui-là, plus grand que celui-là parce que l’artiste avait tout mis à la fois, tout mélangé pour faire comprendre que ce qu’il voulait peindre, c’était le monde tout entier. Un fleuve, un fleuve qui passait dans des forêts, dans des prés, dans des champs, dans des villes, dans des villages. Un fleuve qui tombait finalement là-bas en faisant une grande cascade.[...] Dans les villages, les cheminées fumaient les cloches sonnaient, montrant le nez aux clochetons. Dans les maisons, les âtres étaient allumés. [...] Dans les forêts, les hommes coupaient des arbres. Dans les fermes, on tuait le cochon. [...]” (II,183/4)

One can imagine that Giono had the same painted landscape in mind as he sketched his first description of the Rebeillard country. The legendary tone of a fictional land is signalled by the immediate suggestion of a marine expanse, which, as we have seen, the author strongly associates with the imagination and with destiny. “C’était un large pays tout charnu et houleux comme la mer.” (II,207) Its villages are described as being: “perdus dans l’océan des collines.” (II,208) Giono depicts a panoramic countryside containing an enclosed world, like an illustration on the page of a story book, but replacing the stare of human eyes from above we seem to be given the perspective of the birds that soar above the landscape. “Un aigle se balançait sous les nuages.” (II,207), while further on: “De la falaise de l’arche, les oiseaux arrivèrent. [...] Ils montèrent jusqu’à boucher les nuages et ils regardèrent tout le pays en tournant. De là-haut ils pouvaient voir l’ensemble du pays Rebeillard.” (II,354). Marcel Neveux has noted and discussed how often Giono makes use of “l’œil ornithologique” in his panoramic sketches. “Dès que dans un de ses livres surgit un paysage suspect d’excéder la capacité de l’œil humain, il y a une sorte de délégation de vraisemblance à un deuxième témoin. Souvent l’oiseau bruegelien fait l’affaire.”<sup>1</sup> Here, in this passage from *Le Chant du monde*, the sense of birds watching the landscape as it unrolls below, enhances an impression of simultaneity while emphasising the high visibility of things in the clarity of the day. All seems to be evident, in order, and open to simple interpretation,

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<sup>1</sup> Marcel Neveux, *Jean Giono ou le bonheur d’écrire*, p.265

as Giono devotes several pages of lyrical description to introduce these wooded hills which teem with life going about its normal daily business under the bright sun, producing a *mélange* of animals, insects, trees, clouds, water, fires, light and shadow. Humans are but one part of this mix, and the glimpses of a human peasant society are brief and few. The effect is one of an ageless, mythical, unhurried community of people married to the land.

It is “le grand Tout”, until, almost incidentally, Giono drops a note of discord into the middle of his unfolding description of valley life, before picking up and continuing the commentary. Since the new moon (time here is measured in lunar cycles and the mention of the moon with its association with the night suggests the darker truths hidden beneath the daily activities), five men have died of a mysterious illness: “une mousse noire qui prenait tout le bas du ventre et qui avait comme des racines de fer.”(II,208) The attempt at a remedy for the illness is similarly dark and primitive: “On avait attrapé au piège une grue rouge toute vivante, on l’avait fendue en deux par le milieu d’un bon coup de hache et on était en train de guérir le cordonnier en lui faisant un cataplasme d’oiseau.”(II,208) Ultimately, humans are in the sway of the law of nature in this land, with all that that entails. Death and spilt blood occur as a matter of course.<sup>1</sup> Later in the novel there will be nocturnal scenes which involve the disruption of communities. The destruction of property and the violence and death which will occur between humans will take place at night. While Giono uses *Le Chant du monde* as a vehicle to celebrate, in a positive manner, the sensuous joys to be found within the natural world, there are reminders throughout of the ever present truth of its harsher aspects. The two sides of nature revealed symbolically in the use of the light and darkness of the day/night cycle in the Rebeillard, is also mirrored in the character of Maudru, the patriarchal overlord of this land of dreams and nightmares, whose clan enforces his rule throughout the countryside and whom the peasants esteem with a sort of superstitious awe. In some ways, Maudru could be seen as a replacement for Giono’s ambivalent Pan, who, in *Colline*, was given the title *le patron*. Maudru’s ranch, high in a mountainous hollow, is surrounded by enormous herds of cattle. Rumour precedes him long before he appears: “Il était fort, disait-on, d’une force énorme entassée dans lui avec si peu d’ordre qu’il n’avait plus la figure d’un homme. Dans sa bouche sombre le moindre mot sonnait comme la colère de l’air.” (II, 209). Yet, when Maudru walks the roads of Rebeillard he is always followed by four young

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<sup>1</sup> On the human level, one is also tempted to see in the illness a suggestion of the evils of *ennui*, the ‘leprosy’ that will destroy lives in *Que ma joie demeure* and which will pervade the works of the second manner.

bullocks who love him better than dogs could (II,209), and when he eventually speaks with Antonio, there is in the depths of his voice what the author calls “une tendresse”. (II,332)

The play between darkness and light, on a geographical and a sociological level, is used to reveal further aspects of the Rebeillard country, by way of the contrast between rural and urban settings. Villevieille, the home of the healer, Toussaint, is introduced into the lyrical world of *Le Chant du monde* as the most extreme example of the negative aspect of urban life that is to be found amongst the ongoing town/country oppositions of Giono's early novels. When first seen from a bend in the road before it, it is like a cadaver lying on a hill: “une grande ville très vieille, blanche comme un mort.” (II,275) Up close it is a place of dirt, darkness and noise, a town where cattle are slaughtered and skinned and the hides tanned. From within, the hollow thuds that arise from this industry shake the depths of the entire earth around, a sound which Giono likens to “un gros cœur chargé de sang.” (II,275) The dilapidated houses, speaking of death and decay, perch above the river. This is the same river that emerges as a living creature, fresh and clear from the purity of the high mountains above, where it dances like a horse with “ses gros pieds pleins d'écume.” (II,206) Here, as it churns past Villevieille, the impression is of corruption and pollution as the water takes on a different face. “En bas, le fleuve bouillonnait sous un pont sombre et la ville entraînait dans les eaux par un quai vertigineux tout ruisselant d'une sorte de sanie gluante et mordorée.” (II,275) It is after leaving the town, that the river splits and spreads itself through the open lands of hills and forest which must cleanse and heal it, so that by the time it flows through the gorges and past Antonio's island it is clean and deep: “souple comme du poil de chat.” (II,189)

In line with Giono's frequent low/high opposition of space there is a sharp distinction made within this urban centre between the area known as the lower-town, with its busy populace and gory industry and that of the deserted skeleton of the upper-town. When the clouds are low enough to muffle the sound of the fullers below, the wind twists through the high ruins with a song similar to its passage through a forest. (II,276) The only inhabited house remaining in the upper-town is that of Toussaint the healer. After the formula of the father, in *Jean le Bleu*, the healer embodies enduring hope, and so has remained to restore light to the hopelessness of others. Symbolically set high above the mud and blood, his house seems to be built of air, illumination and shadow. Antonio and Matelot first come upon the house at night, when the play of light against the darkness gives it an elemental quality. This is just one of many instances where Giono will go into some detail about the source of

illumination within a scene. The light here is both incandescent: “Dans l’ombre des lauriers là-haut une longue maison avec du feu aux fenêtres”(II,283); and luminescent: “Une petite eau de lune coulait dans les frises de son toit.” (II,283) – a description which seems to give a sense of healing, suggesting the cleansing that can come through fire and the glow which signals purity. Yet soon, even light itself is depicted as being fearful in the proximity of darkness and in need of the healing hands of Toussaint:

“Chaque fois qu’on portait une lampe dans une pièce de cette énorme maison, la lumière avait peur. Elle ouvrait brusquement deux grandes ailes d’or puis elle se couchait dans la lampe prête à s’éteindre. Toussaint la rassura avec sa main blanche en haut du verre.”(II,306)

The murkiness and dirt of the lower town will be further offset against a pristine white backdrop which makes up the form of the countryside, when the proper onset of winter transforms the surrounding high open areas of Rebeillard into a fairyland; a guise which underlines the fictional aspect of the landscape and the transmutability of the land. In the dark nights, the villages and farms sleep under heavy snow-falls and every morning a sharp little breeze sprinkles “des poussières pleines de lumières”(II,295) over the fields as the rising sun streams over metallic forests. Having made use of an absence of light, Giono now uses the glare of too much light in this sparkling fantasyland, to create another type of invisibility. Mid-winter in the Rebeillard region means endless days of white-out.

“Le jour ne venait plus du soleil seul, d’un coin du ciel, avec chaque chose portant son ombre, mais la lumière bondissait de tous les éclats de la neige et de la glace dans toutes les directions et les ombres étaient maigres et malades, toutes piquetées de points d’or. On aurait dit que la terre avait englouti le soleil et que c’était elle, maintenant, la faiseuse de lumière. On ne pouvait pas la regarder. Elle frappait les yeux.”(II,296)

In the later novel, *Un roi sans divertissement*, the cruel beauty of such a winter world will translate into the cruel actions of men driven to violence in order to break the monotony of the low, black sky, and the unrelenting whiteness of snow which continues to fall. With such scenes, Giono reminds us of the overall dominance of nature as an animate force which deeply affects all human activity. When the reality of the harsher side of nature/life is laid bare in this way, humans must seek either comfort or stimulation by finding a new way of looking at the world. In *Le Chant du monde*, in order to go abroad in the winter daylight, they must search their cupboards for pieces of blue or black silk to mask their eyes against the burning light. Giono suggests an element of the game of make-believe by explaining that

these are the sort of scraps which can be found in those baskets where little girls store their dolls' clothes.

“On se faisait un bandeau, on se le mettait sur les yeux, on pouvait alors partir et marcher dans un sorte d'étrange crépuscule qui ne blessait plus.” (II,296)

The shadow world is the privileged world, Giono here seems to suggest, because it is the one that is filtered through the vision of the author or poet. Paradoxically, s/he is the one who throws light onto a subject and who discovers elemental truths; but it is by the glow of a subjective imagination that subverts reality. This will become explicit at the beginning of the next novel we will examine, *Que ma joie demeure*, when on a night of unusually bright moonlight, the atmosphere anticipates the arrival of Bobi, the gentle poet who will bring a new way of looking:

“Il y avait tant de lumière qu'on voyait le monde *dans sa vraie vérité*, non plus décharné de jour mais engraisé d'ombre et d'une couleur bien plus fine. L'œil s'en réjouissait. L'apparence des choses n'avait plus de cruauté, mais *tout racontait une histoire*, tout parlait doucement aux sens.” (II,417) [emphasis added]

The healer, Toussaint, has also had to discover a new way of looking, through which he has developed his remarkable power of healing. Unable to heal his own body, he remains physically trapped within a twisted frame; but he has learned how to liberate the spirit. It is the very simplicity of a life generally spent in social isolation because of infirmity that has opened him to the mysteries that lie beyond the visible world. In the following conversation between the healer and Antonio, Giono makes it evident that Toussaint is always aware of his own superior inner strength and that of others who have the gift of discernment.:

“La force du dedans de soi, n'a rien à faire avec ça (il ouvrit ses bras pour se montrer avec son petit corps de bois tordu et ses membres de fil), c'est surtout question d'œil et d'oreille, dit-il, et encore, quand je dis question je veux dire qualité véritable et non pas cette beauté qu'on voit.” (II, 308)

Toussaint displays an ethereal quality as he moves about his shadowy, silent house with movements that the author describes as “un frousement de chat” (II,286), while his tiny body hugs the shade. Again, the physical form of his character is revealed to the reader gradually, this time through the eyes of Antonio and Matelot, but when he can be seen fully Toussaint remains a strange other-worldly creature. Along with his books, he has spent so much time studying plants and insects that he seems to have become one with them:

“On le voyait tout entier comme un insecte: le menton en osselet, sec et dur, un immense front mou, lourd, penché sur la droite. Il avait d'énormes yeux en globes hors des orbites

comme si on lui avait mis le pied sur le ventre. Son regard avait l'effleurement chaud et vert d'une branche au soleil." (II,287)

Yet, alone of all the characters in the early novels, who have this harmonious fusion with the universe, Toussaint has formed his world view through conscious and patient reflection on the nature of things: through contemplation, rather than by relying exclusively on intuition and feeling. It is this, that has ensured that his isolation has not reduced him to an animal-like state, and which enables him to translate his feelings into words and to show others the deep significance of things. He is another, now more sophisticated, incarnation of the artist/healer; breaking down the barriers between literature, learning and nature. Through the effect of his words, which convey to his listeners his inner visions, Antonio and Matelot feel themselves translated outside of the immediate world.

"Ils étaient touchés par cette voix d'enfant savant, par ce regard plein de sève ; les longues mains en lanières bougeaient doucement entre les livres et les plantes. Des grandes images leur battaient le visage en les étouffant comme de l'eau." (II,287)

The true healer, according to *le père Jean*, is the poet who can "extinguish wounds": one who has become an incarnation of the redemptive power of words and the strength of the universal life force. Through a composite of Toussaint and Antonio, Giono produces such an entity. Together the two characters, one quiet, cerebral and bodily insubstantial, the other quick, physical and strong (like the Yin and Yang, the dark and the bright of Chinese philosophy), represent the immaterial and material sides to Giono's universe held in perfect balance, suggesting the offer of holistic healing, a marriage of culture and instinct which promises the state of universal equilibrium which Giono likes to believe will bring spiritual wellness to all. A similar balance is present within the individuals themselves, although in Antonio it remains as yet in an immature form. Toussaint imparts the spirit of hope to others through his healing hands, as if infilling them with the power of the mysteries that he has divined. But his extensive intellectual understanding of the medicinal value of herbs and potions, formed from his symbiotic relationship with the natural world as well as from his reading, also allows for the practical application of his knowledge. Antonio, although his integration with the world is described in very physical and sensual terms which reinforce the image of his body as one of its living organisms, is at the same time extremely sensitive to nature's unspoken messages and possesses the mental ability to minister to the spirit of others by gradually learning to express these mysteries in a verbal form.



As we have already suggested, the process of learning to express such truths to others follows a path of gradual enlightenment. It is soon after entering the Rebeillard that the two travellers come across and assist Clara and the meeting marks a profound change in Antonio. He is very quickly no longer the individualist who lives only for the sensuous moment. As he heads north with Matelot, Clara is now carried with him in his mind and in his heart. We can see here yet another reinforcement and development of Giono's ambivalent attitude towards the more primitive human. The earlier Antonio was solely a creature of instinct and of action, reading the external world through his senses, content with the pleasures and challenges that it afforded him. By finding within himself the ability to feel intense love for another, he has gained a new dimension which makes him more completely human. But this process also has its darker side – as a result of its civilising aspect he has lost his contentment, and from now on will know the fear (through the capacity of an active imagination) of losing what he has found. In the midst of his emotional turmoil he admits: “C’est comme si on m’avait saigné, de tout ce qui était mon plaisir. Je ne sais pas si c’est d’être loin de mon fleuve ou si c’est [...] d’être entré dans une espèce d’autre fleuve.” (II,258). He has previously been a purely instinctive voice for the song of the world: “bouche d’or”, floating in the river, singing in his “voix de bête” (II,201), described as having “sa bouche hors de l’eau et son corps plongé dans le monde.” (II,222); but after the meeting with Clara, there has been a change which triggers a yearning within him.

This internal yearning which leads to revelation within the mind, is again portrayed by the author in visual terms through the contrast of darkness and light. By standing under the great expanse of the night sky, and examining the patterns of starlight against the darkness, Antonio now sees in the forms of the constellations the shape of a woman. In naming the stars for Clara, Antonio expresses both the splendour of the world and the longings within himself, and so brings about a union of all three: himself (with his newly found capacity to dream), Clara (with her Earth-Mother signification) and the cosmos – all in synthesis. His voice is no longer merely a channel through which the exterior world can find expression. It is also the channel through which it finds interpretation, before expression, by passing through the “territoires intérieurs” of the imaginative mind. Antonio can now, at will, move between the external world and his own interior one. This is again, another expression on another level, of the birth of the poet/healer– learning to sing the song of the world in his own way and in his own voice. It is what Laurent Fourcaut believes to be the most profound sense of *Le Chant du monde*.

« Ce sera la fonction du personnage d'Antonio que de parvenir, à la fin, à se faire passer pour l'interprète du Monde-Mère, ce qui implique à la fois qu'il ait cultivé des talents de poète (il est le double idéalisé de l'écrivain, son portrait en poisson dans l'eau) et qu'il ait su rester au maximum dans le monde, ayant surmonté la tentation de s'en abstraire pour le posséder de loin. »<sup>1</sup>

The development of the imagination is a mixed blessing for humankind because it can entertain and deepen the darkness of elemental fear, as we have seen in earlier works, but it also entertains the brightness of fear's antidote, hope. Giono's insistence on retaining a spark of hope in the face of the nightmare surfaces in a daylight scene which takes place as the men continue northwards on their quest. The weather begins another work of transformation on a landscape already marked by Gionian *démeseure*, as in a test of mental and physical endurance the travellers must push forward into a driving, slanting mass of sheet rain, where the elements form an oppositional barrier of wind and water against them, as if trying to repel these intruders. As the rain lightens to become a soaking mist, the landscape takes on a markedly surreal aspect:

“Des trous de lumière blême se creusaient dans le nuage. Des fois à l'est, et cela faisait durer un faux matin, des fois à l'ouest comme si le noir était déjà là. Des fois, tout étant noir, une étrange lueur s'ouvrait au nord et on ne pouvait plus savoir le moment du jour, c'était comme une illumination de la fin du monde quand tout sera changé, les aubes et les couchants, et que les morts sortiront de la terre.”(II,260)

Darkness and light have become so confused that the diurnal cycle has been broken, denying the eternal truth expressed in Giono's own statement from “Présentation de Pan”: “Voilà le jour; il est exactement soudé à la nuit. Il recommence, éternellement.”<sup>2</sup> In this timeless, apocalyptic and unreal universe the travellers have lost all point of reference. The external landscape that they are exposed to is stripped bare of all the rich imagery that gives Giono's world its life, and of any meaning that would seem to allow for hope. The author has again dissolved the visible. But the men are not only confronted with a form of nothingness without – along with the inner confusion which freezes their minds, within their bodies the extreme cold enters until they are completely “glacé et raboté par l'eau froide.”(II,262). Except for three warm spots – the place where the voice, which gives life to the word, is

<sup>1</sup> Laurent Fourcaut, « *Le Chant du monde* » de Jean Giono, pp. 22-23

<sup>2</sup> *Présentation de Pan*, I, p. 777

housed: “ils gardaient un peu de chaud sous le menton, contre la gorge, un petit nid” (II,262); the place of the heart and the place of the liver, housed in the pit of the abdomen from where strength flows: “Ils avaient plus dans leur linge ruisselant et le drap de leur veste que le chaud embrasé de leur foie et de leur cœur.”(II,262) Despite their misery and the doomsday images in their minds, the author seems to remind us that these men of nature carry hope in the form of the life-force deep within their being, where it cannot be completely quenched. This apparent dominance of the body over the mind seems at first to be paradoxical, when one considers that Giono’s world is a product of, and subject to, the mind. But it is a matter of a reinforcement of the author’s elevation of instinct over reason, through the consistent association of the imagination and the natural world within the Gionian universe.

As we have seen previously, Giono is interested in the rapport between one sense and another, and between the senses and the thought processes. Thus, in *Le Chant du monde*, as Citron points up, the acuity that the author attributes to the physically blind character, Clara, is not a matter of her merely discerning things with more intensity than the normally sighted individual, but of discerning them in quite a different manner from others. Giono endows Clara with a divination that is suggested by her name. And, for the reader, the early scenes involving invisibility may not only suggest that the character of Antonio has gradually become better equipped to appreciate Clara’s perspective on life, but also act to stimulate the mind to consider the question of how, as humans, we ourselves interact with the surrounding world. We understand that it is not only despite her “blindness,” but because of it, that Clara has developed an ability to discern the depths of things that Giono seems to suggest is more valuable than eye-sight:

“Je me demande, [Clara says of the sighted] ce que ça peut être ce que vous dites: voir! puisque, chaque fois, ça vous trompe.” (II,403)

Yet, even more than her physical condition, this very gift of extra sensitivity is responsible for setting Clara apart from ordinary people, giving rise to the condition of extreme social isolation from which Antonio will rescue her. In the same way, Toussaint, while his particular isolation has allowed him the opportunity to develop some extraordinary talents, is very aware of the fact that he is fundamentally alone: “Seul dans le temps, seul sur la terre. Mourir demain sans laisser de vide en personne.” (II,311) Giono further develops the theme of the problem of the essential solitude of the human spirit which recurs throughout the body of his work. His fantasy of the total integration of humans into the natural world, as

a solution to the existentialist dilemma, is complemented by his fantasy of a harmonious union of humans, one with another. In *Jean le Bleu*, he has had Odripano lament:

“Il y a une chose qui est tout le tragique de la vie[...] c’est que nous ne sommes que des moitiés. Depuis qu’on a commencé à bâtir des maisons et des villes, à inventer la roue, on n’a pas avancé d’un pas vers le bonheur. On est toujours des moitiés. Tant qu’on invente dans la mécanique et pas dans l’amour on n’aura pas le bonheur. [...] Le grand malédiction du ciel pour nous ça a été de nous faire des cœurs à un seul exemplaire. Un pour chacun. Une fois partagés en deux, il te faut trouver ta moitié exacte. Sans quoi tu resteras seul toute ta vie. Et c’est ça le tragique.” (II,175,6)

In Giono’s ideal universe, two souls, joined at the heart, can abolish loneliness, and make sense of the world. But in keeping with his desire for cosmic union, such a love can only exist in obedience to natural laws. As Odripano has stated, it cannot flourish otherwise. In *Le Chant du monde*, Giono reinforces this point when Toussaint thanks Matelot for rescuing his sister from what would seem, for Giono, to be a “fate worse than death” – the fate of a lady from the urban bourgeoisie:

“Si tu n’avais jamais sauté dans le port, toi Matelot, ma sœur serait une dame de Marseille. Son mari vendrait de l’huile ou du savon. Elle aurait son salon avec de grands portraits de vieux hommes et de vieilles femmes, des souliers craquants, sa place marquée dans l’église et dans le théâtre. À son âge, maintenant, elle froterait ses grosses hanches de soie dans des fauteuils. Tu en as fait mieux, toi. Merci pour elle. [...] Je la vois maintenant, non pas morte comme elle serait mais comme elle est, plongée dans la pleine ombre des forêts avec sa robuste vieillesse.”(II,290)

As it is in many of Giono’s earlier works, rescue – in the sense of restoring, rebirthing and bringing another back to the light – is one of the prevelant themes of *Le Chant du monde*. To love another is equal to being able to save them: to restore them to the place where there can be a new beginning, in the middle of a regenerating natural world. In *Regain*, Arsule saves Panturle, both physically from the stream and morally from the solitude which makes him brutish, as he in turn saves her from a life of emotional abuse and provides her with a haven in a virtual island of fertile land. Their symbiotic union, one with another and with the land, is such that when these two characters are exposed to the bustle of a day at the fair in the urban setting of Banon they feel the noise generated by the surrounding masses cut through them like a knife, as if slicing them apart. ( I,411) And in *Un de Baumugnes*, Albin redeems Angèle, releases her from her dark underground prison and restores her to the bright paradise of his mountain home.

Toussaint describes love in quite specific and concrete terms: “le désir d’être au large.[...] L’amour c’est toujours emporter quelqu’un sur un cheval.” (II,323) Thus Antonio will escape with Clara to a new beginning on his island, where he will teach her to see his world, by carrying her away down-river on his raft. The river in *Le Chant du monde* is, as we have seen from the opening chapters, described through images that suggest a powerful living creature which has the attributes of the horse. The specific theme of escape from darkness with another, into a bright new world, will persist in later novels. Angelo will begin and end his odyssey across the surreal landscape of *Le Hussard sur le toit* on horseback, and it is in that manner that he and Pauline will flee that dark, diseased world together. In *Pour saluer Melville*, Herman and Adelina (in very many ways, the prototype for the couple of Angelo and Pauline) form their relationship as they travel through areas of rural poverty, found within the English countryside, by a coach that is pulled by a horse. Herman dreams of never having to lose Adelina:

“Il imagina un monde autre que le monde réel où il ne la perdrait pas. Il faudrait que l’air soit un mur invisible mais solide et que j’y connaisse une porte. Il imaginait qu’il ouvrirait cette porte et derrière était un autre monde. Il disait : « Venez, madame. » elle venait. Il fermait la porte derrière eux et ils étaient ainsi tous les deux dans un pays; un pays inimaginable où il était seul à la connaître et elle connaissait que lui. Inséparables.”(III,54)

For both of them, for a short and magical time, the world created by the imaginative mind and expressed through the skilfully selected words of the author/poet, takes the place of reality. This world, that the couple can enter at will, remains uniquely theirs, because it is born from their imaginations working in concert. It parallels the individual world that is shaped by the writer and the reader.

These defining moments of the novel *Pour saluer Melville*, have their forerunner, in turn, in the relationship between Antonio and Clara. Giono depicts Antonio, soon after setting out on the journey northwards, again standing before a night sky which has erased the earth leaving only a dimensionless darkness. “La nuit était beaucoup plus vaste que le jour.”(II,245) Suddenly the sky unrolls a whole world of incandescence and luminescence that is hidden throughout the day by the glaring (and obvious) light of the sun. “Au fond, le lait de la vierge ; des chariots de feu, des barques de feu, des chevaux de lumière, une large éteule d’étoiles tenaient tout le ciel.” (II,245) Giono again imbues the spirit of the poet with the pleasure that he himself achieves through creation. Antonio can only think that Clara has

never seen such a sight and his one desire is to share such experiences with her, to bring her enlightenment, to lead her “à travers tout ce qui a une forme et une couleur.” (II,258)

In a further exploration of the association between the senses, human instinct and the thought processes, Giono begins to assess just how much of earth's teeming life is already available to the understanding of the visually impaired. He reveals this speculation through the musings of his protagonist, Antonio. The author has elsewhere expressed his belief that the blind person must always carry a rich wealth of purely subjective images within their mind. This, he believes, is because s/he has the latent ability to become intuitively much closer to the mystery of the cosmos than others. Such a “person ne connaît que les objets assez petits pour tomber sous le sens de son toucher. Le mystère commence plus près de lui que pour les autres hommes, un arbre est déjà pour lui un objet cosmique.” (Journal du 8 août 1938)<sup>1</sup> Antonio's speculation on the sensory information that Clara can receive is expressed in a long passage, descriptive of the mix that makes up what is called the *furieuse* and *hâtive* (II,245) life of the earth under the sunlight, and involving adjectives and images that convey the tactile and the audible:

“Ces chênes crispés, ces animaux tout pantelants de leur sang rapide, ce bruit de bonds, de pas, de courses, de galops et de flots, ces hurlements et ces cris, ce ronflement de fleuve, ce gémissement que de temps en temps la montagne pousse dans la vent, ces appels, ces villages pleins de meules de blé et de meules à noix, les grands chemins couverts de silex que les chariots broient sous les roues de fer, ce long ruissellement de bêtes qui troue les halliers, les haies, les prairies, les bois épais dans les vallons et les collines...”(II,245)

In the contrasting stillness of his immediate surroundings, Antonio ponders on how he could possibly help Clara to grasp the emotions that are aroused within him by the silent scene overhead. There follows a splendid display of shadow, light and colour: a detailed description of the coming dawn conveys information to the reader of all that Antonio sees, inviting him/ her to participate in the character's enjoyment, to dream the dream, at the same time as it underlines the inadequacy of words as a vehicle to convey such images to someone with no visual point of reference.

We have already noted, in the discussion on PAN, the notion that the internalisation of the perceived world, the subjectivity of the human viewpoint, gives rise to difficulties in

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<sup>1</sup> Giono, cited by Robert Ricatte, I, p.XXII

making us understood by one another. The growing desire to communicate his strongest and deepest feelings and dreams to another makes the limitation of ordinary words a source of increasing frustration for Antonio. He bitterly complains to Matelot of the need for a different language: for a new way of telling.

“On ne peut pas se faire comprendre des autres. Tu comprends ? Jamais rien, jamais rien de ce qu’on a ; le meilleur jamais tu le feras comprendre. Il n’y a pas de mots – il renifla à plein nez en plissant d’un coup tout son visage – ça devrait se respirer comme une odeur.” (II,362)

A similar feeling to Antonio’s will be expressed in *Que ma joie demeure* when Bobi first attempts to bring joy and clarity through his words, to people who are sad and disinterested in existence.

“ “ Tu es obligé d’aimer le monde,” dit Bobi.

Il y avait toujours quelque chose de pas clair. Et l’éclaircissement ne venait presque plus de Bobi, ni de sa voix ni de ses mots, l’éclaircissement venait du chaud, du feu, du gel, du mur, de la vitre, de la table, de la porte qui battait dans le vent du nord et des dalles du parquet qui suaient doucement l’argile quoique vieilles. L’éclaircissement venait de toutes ces choses mais c’était encore gauche et maladroit, et le seul avantage de Bobi c’est qu’il mettait des mots d’homme sur ces mots du feu, d’argile, de bois et de ciel pur. Il essayait de mettre des mots d’homme. Mais ça n’était pas tout à fait ça. Si on avait pu avoir des mots-feu et des mots-ciel, alors oui.” (II,460)

Giono thus suggests, through the mouths of his characters, that his vision can only be communicated through a language that will appeal to all the senses. He, of course, develops and experiments with such a style by using the metaphor as his principle device. At times his expressions are extreme and possibly indulgent, but the deliberately unusual alliance of images that he makes within the metaphoric formula are an attempt at breaking down all frontiers between the different realms of existence by abolishing discrepancies in density, distance and proportion. By imbuing all matter with a life force, he allows all things the potential for supernatural communication from a multitude of different perspectives and perceptions, with the aim of achieving the desired universal harmonisation.

It is for this reason, that near to the end of *Le Chant du monde* Giono selects the character of Clara to give the lesson in communication, as she shows Antonio her particular and unique world. Because names mean little to Clara, words are used entirely as a means to stimulate and encourage the use of the senses. There is a poetic spontaneity to her language – she uses metaphors and descriptions which involve the things that she can touch, smell and

hear while imaginatively mixing sensations, elements, plants and animals together to convey one total, immediate sense impression:

“Dans toute la colline il y a des pattes, des ongles, des museaux, des ventres. Entends-les ! Des arbres durs, des tendres, des froides, des fleurs chaudes. Là-bas derrière un arbre long. On entend son bruit tout droit. Il fait le bruit de l’eau quand elle court. Il a de longues fleurs comme des queues de chats et qui sentent le pain cru.” (II,404)

Although being himself restricted to the use of symbols (in the form of letters, combined together as words) as the vehicle for conveying his own thoughts, Giono attempts to move the communication between the young couple of this novel beyond even the words of poetry. He does this partly through the imagery of darkness and light. The novel which began in darkness, symbolic of Antonio’s lack of purpose and Clara’s distressed wandering, nears its conclusion in bright sunlight as a symbol of hope and promise. The emphasis is on the concrete and the physical. Just as at the denouement of *Naissance de l’Odyssée*, invention takes on a solid form and completely effaces reality, so with the return of the lovers to the realm which will succour and protect them, Giono indulges in the fulfilment of his fantasy. The couple reach a stage of “oneness” which allows them to communicate by relying on a type of super-sensual instinct which allows for an unspoken lyricism to flow between them. Antonio steers the raft down river, returning to the island that will become home for them both. Although there is another couple present, and Antonio carries on a surface conversation of words with the twin, his mind is totally focused on Clara. It is this sub-text that is important and that is communicated to the reader. The scene is fully lit, enabling Antonio to watch Clara intently. He now has the perspicacity to read the language of her body and to guess what she wants: “Il le voyait au mouvement de cette bouche, au pli qui courait sur la joue, au soupir. [...] Il savait ce qu’elle voulait mieux qu’elle” (II,410) and he responds by steering the raft into the coolness of the shade, then into the warmth from the sun, under the low foliage which brushes her face, or against the banks of flowers. The two lovers complement one another like shadow and light, and they are as much at one with the world around them as they are with each other. As the day fades into a final night, they are on course to reach their island home at the time of the light of a fresh dawn.

On the symbolic level, Antonio’s union with Clara, who is so strongly associated with maternity and the earth, has finally achieved the desired integration of man both with the *magna mater* and with another of his own kind. Together they are “comme deux bouteilles qu’on vide l’une dans l’autre et puis on renverse encore et elles s’illuminent l’une l’autre



avec le même vin.” (II,410) In this utopian vision, the couple have moved beyond metaphors. It is as if, having fulfilled their ultimate purpose of revealing the underlying connectiveness of the universe, words have now become defunct. The couple have developed an instinctive language of silent communion through mutual understanding; they have become part of the total harmony of all living things, which gives voice to the pure song of the world.

**Conclusion:** Giono has used the imagery of darkness and light in various ways throughout *Le Chant du monde* to underpin its overall theme of enlightenment. The major construct of the novel examines the question of blindness and sight and it is those characters who are receptive to the influences of the living world who are favoured by the author, as they alone are capable of the perspicacity that can bring them healing and fulfilment. The universe of *Le Chant du monde* is almost entirely perceived through the senses of the author’s visionary characters in a process which involves a systematic disclosure of the secrets of the invisible world through a decrease in illumination, or a similar disclosure of the visible world through an increased use of light. In the first instance, various forms of obscuration eliminate the effectiveness of the faculty of sight, to varying degrees, in order to exaggerate the function of the remaining senses in the process of perception. In the second instance, Giono has emphasised colour, form and shadow by identifying and detailing the way in which scenes are illuminated and by using sources of luminescent or incandescent light in his imagery to reveal the inner quality of his subjects, both animate and inanimate. The diurnal and annual cycles are additional tools which allow fluctuations in the quality and quantity of light and darkness. Giono has used the effect of the seasons on the elements to construct his landscapes, which can range in tone from brilliant to sombre, working sometimes in the extreme colours of black and white to create an effect of *chiaroscuro*, revealing the bleakness underlying the reality of existence, which is suggestive of themes to be developed in his later work. In turn, the influence of these landscapes upon the human heart produces moods which can fluctuate between dark despair and bright hope. As well, the author uses the symbolism of darkness and light to reveal his own particular prejudice against urban settings. His dislike of modern urbanisation and mechanisation appears to be used as a justification for the unashamed indulgence with which he paints his vivid images of a personified natural world.

The character of Toussaint as teacher and healer, tempers this licence by revealing that understanding comes not just through an ability to perceive the secrets of nature, but also from reading/hearing the word of other enlightened minds. Giono again raises the question

of a necessary balance between the seer's integration into the natural world and into human society and culture. The poet has a duty to attempt to enlighten and heal others, by replacing dark despair with the light of hope.

This in turn raises the question of the individual's role within the community. Giono's lovers reinforce the idea of enlightenment and completion through a perfect (and exclusive) union. There is an inherent paradox in the idea of a retreat from society by the very character who has developed the ability to act as the intermediary between humans and nature. Antonio, "bouche d'or", finds the one special person that he can relate to at an instinctive level and together they escape to an ideal world. One is reminded of Giono as he depicts himself in *Noé*, isolated in his studio, accompanied only by his characters. There may be for him an enjoyment as well a moral duty in sharing the love of the living world and the redemptive power of the poetic word with others, but above all, the poet/author seems to compose for the sheer joy of creating. While acknowledging that his words contain a strong didactic element, and his inventive metaphors strive to convey depths of meaning and feeling, one can also believe, at the same time, that it is only incidental that they are being read and heard by others.

## Chapter Five – Earth and Sky

*La jeunesse est l'état d'un homme qui porte et emploie avec aisance et gloire  
une force qui le rend utile à tout, sauf aux dieux.<sup>1</sup>*

**Introduction:** Giono's first novel, *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, was an exploration of the process of creation. In subsequent novels we have been able to trace a progressive development of the creative act as a response to the human condition, moving from the yearnings and imaginative fears generated as an emotional response of the primeval mind to the natural world, towards a state of mental enlightenment which takes the form (for the author) of an ability to inhabit a compensatory world of poetic illusion. By this stage of Giono's writing, for those privileged beings with the soul of a poet, the mind has now evolved and attuned itself to become an instrument capable of making a conscious choice to indulge the longings of the heart by selecting specific aspects of the external world to experience through the senses and to enhance through the imagination; a skill which developed with the maturation of the young Jean of *Jean le Bleu*, and was practised by the heroes of *Le Chant du monde*.

It is a dissatisfaction with life as it is, the world as it exists, that has fuelled the human drive toward exploration and imaginative creation in an attempt to achieve the desideratum. If we exclude *Colline*, all the works of the first manner that we have discussed, have presented characters that at some level face the internal struggle between a basic need for comfort and security and the yearning for adventure. In a more direct manner than any other work to date, the final novel that we will centre the discussion on, *Que ma joie demeure*, addresses this inner tension within humans which reflects, on an individual level, the much larger existential question of human purpose in the universe that has occupied the early works. “Les hommes, au fond, ça n'a pas été fait pour s'engraisser à l'auge, mais ça a été fait pour maigrir dans les chemins, traverser des arbres et des arbres, sans jamais revoir les mêmes; s'en aller dans sa curiosité, connaître. C'est ça, connaître (II,418)”, muses one of the work's main characters.

The many wanderers and vagabonds of Giono's novels are practical proof of a drive towards enlightenment, and present only the external manifestation of an inner need which initiates each individual quest for meaning, happiness or purpose. Their voyage, whether

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<sup>1</sup> Giono: “Triomphe de la vie”, *Récits et essais*, p.661

physical or mental, initially involves solitude: the search for happiness is essentially subjective. From Ulysses on, many travelling seekers have and will, in the works to come, serve as personæ for the author – Amedée, Antonio, the occupants of “La Maison des errants” in *Jean le Bleu* are only a few from the first manner, and among the many more in the post war novels will be the main protagonists of *Les grands chemins* and of course the principal character of the *Hussard Cycle*. In *Que ma joie demeure*, the wanderer is the solitary poet/acrobat Bobi, a man who comes from out of nowhere to a little community desiring to bring to others the healing formula for happiness that he has discovered through his travels: “la passion de l’inutile.” (II,438)<sup>1</sup> His code of inverted values is couched within the poetic word and suggests healing through a comfort which is at the same time exhilarating: a challenge which promises to resolve the internal struggle and satisfy the human heart once and for all – a magic formula that will finally make the joy last.

But “L’inquiétude. Toujours attendre.” (II,595) says one of the characters of this novel. How long can the creative illusion be sustained against the starkness of the human situation? The author uses *Que ma joie demeure* to explore this question, by establishing an arena in which he sets up an ultimate confrontation between reality and the dream. We can look at this process from two interrelated angles:

a) *The underlying symbolism employed by Giono*, as through imagery he relates the continuous struggle within the human heart to its universal dimension. To this end, he makes constant use of the opposition of tracts of earth and sky with their associated values of solidity, stability and circumscription on the one hand and luminosity, mystery, movement and infiniteness on the other. Paradoxically (as one has come to expect with Giono), there is also a parallel theme which runs alongside this binary opposition at the same time as it is being established, and which often deconstructs it, in the sense of demonstrating its inherent instability. Bobi the acrobat/poet brings a new perspective which can turn the world upside down. The creative word, once again, establishes the reality of a shadow world – the Gionian world of illusion, which has its own solidity – while figuratively “vaporising” the tenuous world of factuality.

b) *The portrayal of the poet/artisan as a healer of the people*. Central to the author’s ongoing attempt to restore spiritual balance to humankind in general is the presence of some

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<sup>1</sup> Giono says elsewhere: “l’inutile dont je parle n’est pas du tout le péché capital que maudissent les bourgeois et les bourgeoises. Je parle de l’inutile à tout, sauf aux dieux.” “Triomphe de la vie”, *Récits et essais* p.661

strong catalytic influence to enable a marriage of the power of human creativity with the elemental forces of nature. Giono continues to pursue, at a fictional level, his goal of a harmonious integration of humans into the natural world surrounding them. Having achieved a total integration (indulgently) with the couple from *Regain* and from *Le Chant du monde*, his desire seems to be to extend this success to an entire community. Before long, with the communal gathering at the mountain retreat known as the Contadour, he will attempt a similar feat in the real world. Through Bobi, Giono anticipates his real life role at the Contadour: exploring a desire to bring rejuvenation to a group of people by uniting them in strong community and immersing them in a natural environment which they have learned to respect and enjoy with the mind. The validity of his idea is to some extent explored throughout the book, at times lending the work a sense of improvisation and investigation, at others moving it into the realm of obvious fantasy. The author has often said, in different ways,<sup>1</sup> that to sit down to write is to set out into the unknown on a journey of discovery.

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There is consequently an ever present sense of the experimental and the explorative in the unfolding events of *Que ma joie demeure*. The experiment involves the inhabitants of a widely scattered (if very small) community living on an elevated and expansive area known as the Grémone Plateau – “Le haut du pays” (II,653). Although this vast area is situated in near proximity to a modern town, the plateau dwellers remain physically, psychologically and socially segregated. The customary division within humanity between the dreamer and the materialist (a division which we have labelled previously as the “sentient” versus the “insensible”, in recognition of Giono’s rather extreme position) often takes the form of a country and town opposition, but will take on a slightly different aspect in this novel. As is usual within the early works, the few references to town life make it clear that industrialisation and modernisation has killed the soul and left the heart of the urban populace barren. But although separated from urban life (preserved from it in the usual Gionian manner, by being set apart in the timeless purity of the high country), the inhabitants of the plateau have become unaware of the natural splendour of the world surrounding them and of its simple joys. Seeing things only in utilitarian terms, they have lost the perspective of the child, or the ability to simply enjoy a thing for its inherent beauty. They have lost the pleasure in living. *Que ma joie demeure* reflects back to the theme of blindness of the soul, and the question of true sight, which was examined in *Le Chant du monde*. The members of

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<sup>1</sup> For two of several possible examples, see his comments reproduced in Chapter 3, p.94.

the community suffer from a form of elective blindness. They remain, however, honest folk with good hearts. In other words, they remain redeemable: people with the potential to understand the world, in need of a saviour not just because of their general lack of purpose, but because of a loss of innocence which ( for Giono) translates to a misuse of the natural world. In this case such a misuse is a matter of living in a state of insensitivity and ignorance towards the gifts around them. Jean-François Durand describes it in terms of having renounced the poetic for the prosaic: “ Ce qui est mort, ici, c’est le regard du poétique. Le monde désenchanté retombe en grisaille, il perd sa profondeur lyrique, s’aplatit, se dispose en décor. « Le cœur mourait », écrit Giono. Or, le cœur, c’est la source des métaphores.”<sup>1</sup>

Giono has set up a situation where what is needed (according to the formula that his father gave to the young Jean, in *Jean le Bleu*<sup>2</sup>) is a poet with an eagerness to heal – one filled with enough joy to re-enchant the world. Such a man will act as the catalyst: the essential, powerful external force which exerts an influence upon the senses of others, enabling them to interiorise and transform the everyday aspects of their surroundings. Consequently, the novel opens with a scene of anticipation as the character of Jourdan waits for the coming of a deliverer who we immediately recognise as fitting the role of healer: a man with “des mains soignantes and un cœur bien verdoyant” (II,420), to teach him and others how to live completely. Just to “know” that such a person exists induces the positive attitude of a state of hopeful expectation. “ La joie peut demeurer, se dit Jourdan. Seulement, se dit-il. Il faudrait que celui-là vienne.” (II,420) This “knowledge” is akin to a form of biblical faith, the “substance of things hoped for”.<sup>3</sup> The subsequent arrival of the anticipated stranger has, therefore, many of the elements symbolically associated with the initiation of the healer that Morzewski has identified in his study on this theme as it relates to *Jean le Bleu*<sup>4</sup>: a nocturnal arrival at a brightly lit destination, situated at altitude. There is also a deliberate messianic aspect to Bobi which has been foreshadowed by the expectation in the heart of Jourdan. Because the healer comes to fulfil the mission from the father (*le père Jean*) he will cause the blind to see. And as the poet who will speak forth the healing word he is in one way an incarnation of the Word (as well as another incarnation of the author). He appears on the elevated skyline standing with his legs apart: “entre ses jambes, on voyait la nuit et une étoile.” (II,421) The obvious Christian symbolism surrounding the appearance of

<sup>1</sup> Jean-François Durand, *Les Métamorphoses de l'Artiste*, p.146

<sup>2</sup> “Si, quand tu seras un homme, tu connais ces deux choses : la poésie et la science d’éteindre les plaies, alors, tu seras un homme.” (J.L.B.,II,170)

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 11 :V.1

<sup>4</sup> Christian Morzewski, *La lampe et la plaie: Le mythe du guérisseur dans « Jean le Bleu » de Giono.*

the character of Bobi, and his mission, bears witness to Giono's familiarity with the Bible.<sup>1</sup> The title for the novel, however, borrowed from the famous chorale by Bach, has seen the elimination of the word "Jesus". As Christophe Pradeau puts it: "La lecture religieuse est écartée au profit d'une lecture profane où l'on reconnaît le culte de Giono pour le joie des sens."<sup>2</sup>

The very first metaphor of *Que ma joie demeure* signals the beginning of the magic through which Giono's messianic healer hopes to unite the cosmos, join individuals in community and repair the divided hearts of humans. The bringing together of the two realms of earth and sky signifies the interconnectedness of the whole physical world.

"C'était une nuit extraordinaire.

Il y avait eu du vent, il avait cessé, et les étoiles avaient éclaté comme de l'herbe. Elles étaient en touffes avec des racines d'or, épanouies, enfoncées dans les ténèbres et qui soulevaient des mottes luisantes de nuit." (II,415)

For Jourdan, who is the only one awake on the plateau, the night is like a manifestation of all his longings. As in Giono's first novel, where the sea invaded the land through the imagination of Ulysses as human dreams replaced external reality, here the use of poetic imagery channels the yearning of the collective human heart through one man, projecting all this energy from the earth out into the cosmos and pulling all the mystery and light of the heavens down to the earth. The strong imagery used throughout *Que ma joie demeure* to link heaven and earth in cosmic unity, is typified by the first simile with which Bobi engages the interest of Jourdan: "Orion ressemble à une fleur de carotte" (II,424). Reprised several times later in the book, the words become a formula used by the characters to verbally acknowledge occasions where a common everyday experience is perceived in a new way, thus revealing a previously hidden beauty.

The limitless expanse which was generally formed by the sea in *Naissance de l'Odysée*, becomes the great sweep of the sky in *Que ma joie demeure*, and, as it always has, it presents for humans an exposure to a dimension where vulnerability is set against the promise of

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<sup>1</sup> This familiarity – acquired in Giono's early years of eclectic reading – is especially evident when it comes to the Old Testament. Sylvie Vignes, drawing on some of the detailed work of others on this subject, in particular the work of Llewelyn Brown, notes that at this particular period of his work Giono multiplies the biblical allusions in his writing: « sa syntaxe, ses cadences musicales et ses figures d'analogie gardent le souvenir du style hébraïque. » Sylvie Vignes, *Giono et le travail de sensation*, p.21

<sup>2</sup> Christophe Pradeau, *Jean Giono*, p.33

freedom. Beneath the sky, the main arena of the action is once again found at the degree of physical elevation which designates a space with a certain mythical quality.<sup>1</sup> From the beginning there is a metaphysical aspect to the Grémone setting – reminiscent of the high plateau that Antonio and Matelot must cross in the Rebeillard country – where the frequent occurrence of fog and mist gives rise to an element of mystery, transforming the countryside by changing and distorting shapes and deceiving the ear. The expansiveness of the area along with the scattered nature of the small settlements makes it a place of solitude, while the physical spaciousness also holds the promise of happenings of epic proportions.

Giono reinforces this promise by the use of typically dramatic weather patterns. It is worth examining in detail the description of a spring rain storm which runs across the plateau, because it provides an excellent example of the way that the author combines the natural forces of the external world with the imagination of the human mind, using elements of earth and sky to form the new compounds which make up his unique, fictional, compensatory universe. The extract shows a progression which builds through a crescendo to a peaceful and joyous celebration of the perfected cosmic mix.

Giono commences the chapter with a phrase which serves to emphasise the crucial role the forces from the natural world play in shaping the daily attitudes and emotions of his human characters. “Rien ne serait arrivé sans le vent bleu.” (II,568) *Naissance de l’Odyssée* has established the chimerical dimension of blue/green water. As this gentle wind came up from the sea it carried with it the shadows of dreams that move and mix: “Le vent bleu monta de la mer”.(II,568) Giono then changes to the present tense as if this is no longer just the wind that sprang up at one point in time on the Grémone plateau, but a timeless wind, happening on earth somewhere now, because its type occurs in all the springs that ever have, or ever will, take place.

“Il est chargé de nuages. Il souffle seulement au printemps. Il traîne sous lui la pluie et la chaleur. Il couche de grandes ombres sur les prés, sur les terres où le blé pousse, sur les bosquets d’arbres. Ces ombres, épaissies par le reflet des sèves nouvelles, sont les plus bleues de toutes les ombres.”(II,568-69)

The shadows that the wind brings deepen the mystery of the fecundity of the earth, while the air above mounts a parade of the fabulous creatures created in the imaginations of those who

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<sup>1</sup> The Mountain of Lure, the plateau above the village of Aubignane, the high land of the Baumugnes and the elevated mountains of Maudru’s domain have all been fictional spaces.



turn their faces to the sky. Immense clouds shape themselves into monstrous objects which the wind constantly reforms, so that "l'imaginaire" achieves and celebrates the desired unity of the cosmos.

"[...] il les anime d'une grande vie qui n'est pas enfermée dans chaque nuage, homme, bête, ou cheval, mais qui passe de l'un à l'autre sans barrière : si bien qu'à tout moment, la forme de l'homme coule doucement en échine de bête, le cheval a fait un bond gigantesque, puis il a laissé couler ses jambes épaisses, ses cuisses, ses sabots se sont rejoins et il est devenu comme une montagne : sa crinière est une forêt d'arbres. Puis, tout de nouveau coule et glisse avec toutes les formes du monde.[...]"(II,569)

Giono then turns back from his evocation of the subjective world that human minds will always create from turbulent skies. He signals this by reverting to the imperfect tense, to re-establish the time frame of the novel. A rain storm sweeps overhead. Here, in the rain unleashed on the plateau, is a reminder of the ever present powerful force of raw nature, as we have seen it in earlier novels. The strength of the rain repeats and mirrors on earth the transformation that the wind achieved with the clouds of the sky, by melting everything into one great mixture of elements:

"Elle ne tombait pas du ciel; elle sautait hors du sud par gros paquets comme si elle était lancée de la mer. La terre du plateau écrasée par le poids retombant de ces vagues, blessée par la tranchant de ces lames d'eau qui frappait de biais, fumante d'embruns, tout écorcée, ayant découvert son tendre, coulait en épais ruisseaux de boue le long de toutes les pentes. Les graines, surprises dans leur vie souterraine, se débattaient, se cramponnaient de toutes leurs racines à de petits grumeaux de terre que la pluie effritait, puis le flot soudain des eaux les arrachait de leur trou et les emportait, racines écartées, comme de petites méduses."(II,569)

To the mix of water, earth, air and vegetable matter the author adds light, as if to remind the reader that although it is the elements that control and fashion the world, at the final count it is always the human imagination that perceives and interprets what the eye sees. The world, once again, becomes illuminated by the creative dream. It takes on the distorted perspective of light reflected through water, interpreted by the mind of the story-teller who is at the centre of this cosmic mix.

"Soudain, dans un écartement de nuages, le calme et le soleil tombaient comme une gerbe de feu. Les flaques, la rainure des longues herbes, les nervures des feuilles, la pointe des chardons, le gras de la terre, tout ce qui gardait un fil d'eau ou un suintement éclatait de reflets. Des paliers de lumière portaient le regard ébloui de la terre à l'herbe, de l'herbe à l'arbre, de l'arbre jusqu'aux cavernes du ciel où, dans la profondeur des gouffres en

mouvement, volaient les étincelantes colombes du soleil. Puis tout se mettait à glisser de ce qui était la couleur et la lumière de la terre comme le mouvement éclatant des écailles d'un serpent qui marche. "(II, 569-70)

Within the luminosity of this dream world the colours show out brightly, and the ultimate mixture of animal, vegetable, mineral and the elements incorporates the mark of mankind within the landscape, before all is obliterated to provide a clean palette for the next set of impressions.

"Le rose du toit lointain de Mouille-Jacques se fondait dans le vert d'un pré, le bleu d'un nuage passait à l'azur du ciel, le vert du pré se fondait peu à peu jusqu'à se confondre avec la sombre frondaison des ormes à la limite du champ perdu d'oncle Silve; le ciel blanchissait, les ombres couraient sur le plateau comme des traces de pas; l'eau coulait le long des rainures des herbes, [...] jetait brusquement mille reflets nouveaux avant de s'éteindre sous l'ondulation balancée d'une nouvelle pluie grise que le vent apportait de la mer. " (II, 570)

*Que ma joie demeure* will cycle through two springs, and these distinct seasons of change are pivotal to the story. In the patterns that Giono forms from the natural world the reader can see the buds of two different stages in the development of the human community:

The first spring signals new hope – a time of awakening and opportunity when there is a dawning awareness of the magic that the world could hold for the people of the plateau. From early in this spring, when the characters begin to believe that nothing that has been before needs to remain the same, and anything still seems possible, one finds the promise of new life, as displayed in this image of light within a gentle amorphism which incorporates earth and sky:

"Les étoiles remplissaient le ciel. Ce n'étaient plus les étoiles d'hiver, séparées, brillantes. C'était comme du frai de poisson. Il n'y avait plus rien de formé dans le monde, même pas de choses adolescentes. Rien que du lait, des bourgeons laiteux, des graines laiteuses dans la terre, des semences de bêtes et du lait d'étoiles dans le ciel. (II,483)"

The second spring reflects the beginning of disillusionment. By the end of a season that up until then has been "gentle", Giono gives us the description of a vigour which suddenly increases to become wild. The use of metaphors now gives way to a more direct form of description which makes the imagery immediately available to the reader's mind and so increases its intensity. The images again involve facets of earth and sky. The heat from the

sun and the wind descend to the earth from the heavens; the birds that fly in the atmosphere are also grounded through the nests that they build at the very base of grasses charged with a life force which erupts from the earth with such an augmentation of noise that it sounds in the ears like a warning:

“Il écrasa les larges prés de Randoulet sous de la chaleur et du vent. Tous les oiseaux s’envolèrent. Les derniers qui étaient restés dans les nids au fond de l’herbe écoutaient le bruit des grosses racines réveillées, et le roulement de la sève dans les tiges, et le sifflement de la sève qui s’épanouissait dans les feuilles, et le clapotement de la sève qui sortait en bulles de toutes les fentes des bourgeons.” (II,685)

From this time in the second spring, one begins to see the first signs in the united human community of potential division and misunderstanding which will eventually lead to tragedy. This rupture is caused through the strength and subjectivity of human desires, aroused by the relentless potency of the life force flowing through the natural world.

During those passages in the novel which illustrate the stages of renewal and change being brought about by the advent of spring, Giono almost incessantly portrays all things in the teeming universe as being in a state of fluidity and flux. But this wealth of varied and ever-changing forms is not just restricted to the plasticity of the visible world. Giono has been weaving together the various themes of his novels with an increasing complexity, now suggesting multiple layers of existence – the realms of the past, the various dimensions found within the present, and the world of possible futures – which will in later works take tangible shape in the imbricate areas of space which he will render in *Noé*, and in the everyday worlds belonging to characters such as those of *Mort d’une personne*, where several fictional realms will physically interlock and intertwine.

To make use of this novel to display an example of this developing complexity, one need look no further than Giono’s extensive employment of the simple image of seeds and grain. Seed imagery is associated most obviously and constantly with the abstract idea of new beginnings: as a concrete form of the hope that Bobi brings, which holds the promise of a harvest of joy. In a visible realisation of this hope within the everyday world, Jourdan casts handfuls of wild-flower seeds in the oat fields. The practical yield of a food crop is replaced by the frivolity of periwinkles and narcissi, grown purely for the pleasure one can take from their beauty. And the metamorphosis which takes place within countless other seed-forms – becoming the runners, shoots and buds that expand and burgeon into the extraordinary

number of varied plants which Giono supplies throughout the seasons – constantly tracks the rapidly changing face of nature over the passage of time, throughout the entire novel.

Grain holds the promise of the practical fruits that will result from the cooperation of man and nature, something that we have already seen clearly demonstrated through the production of a loaf of bread in *Regain*. But the nourishment that it provides for humans and animals can be spiritual as well. Jourdan is encouraged by Bobi to give the excess wheat that he has hoarded from a previous harvest back to the natural world, in a gesture of extravagant (and healing) generosity. Initially, the grain appears dull and colourless when it is poured out on the winter ground for the hungry birds. But by making the choice of a spiritual harvest in renouncing the wheat's usefulness as a commodity that can be traded for cash, Jourdan invests it with new value. In the feeding frenzy which follows, the grain flies in the beating of golden wings, and each morsel becomes transformed into a speck of brilliance. Once again, for Giono, images of illumination accompany the concept of seeds of enlightenment taking root within the human mind.

Seeds also represent tiny, self-contained forms of the Gionian ideal: perfectly integrated little worlds. Giono has used the idea of seeds as microcosms before. We have seen one example from *Jean le Bleu*, where their potential power was realised in words, but in this novel the living forces and forms contained within, waiting to develop, make up another component of Giono's ever present shadow-world because they are a part of what could be, or will be: a part of the possible. This association of everyday factuality with its parallel world of possibility, is demonstrated by the author in an association of earth and sky that is depicted through the age-old customs and ritual involved with the communal sowing of the grain in the wheat fields of the plateau.

“Jacquou regarda le ciel. Il avait la première poignée de graines dans son poing. Il regarda le ciel. Jourdan regarda le ciel. [...] C'était l'instinct. [...] la graine a une vieille force électrique qui traverse les peaux les plus coriaces et illumine les cœurs les plus sauvages, et, quand on a une poignée de graines blondes à jeter devant soi pour la semence, [...] si on est un homme digne du nom, on est obligé de regarder le ciel.” (II,623)

“Et dans les profondeurs du ciel, malgré le plein jour de midi, on pouvait apercevoir quelques étoiles. Elles étaient absolument pareilles à des graines de blé.” (II,627)

Here the living force contained within the seeds is referred to in terms that explicitly describe it as having the power and illuminative properties capable of transforming human hearts –

generating the type of insight that Giono believes will inevitably occur when the ageless customs of man working in concert with nature are respected. The stars are those that appear at the sowing season; called *logis*, because by tradition, their visibility, which is dependent upon the weather, is a portent of the season to come. In these “houses in the sky” Giono lodges the hope or despair of the tillers of the earth.

As these last two examples bear witness, the seed imagery takes a central part in the metaphorical linkage of earth and sky. If the stars of the sky are exactly parallel to the grains of wheat, then a handful of grain is the same thing as a handful of stars. There is an ongoing extension, through imagery, of the metaphor, “Orion- fleur de carotte”, which underlines the Gionian fascination with the abolition of distance and with the interchangeability of the infinitely large and the almost infinitesimal.

“À certains endroits, dans les plis de la terre – et ces plis étaient un peu noirs d’humidité et vivants – il y avait une petite mousse verte. Vue de près, quand on en prenait au bout de son doigt, ça se montrait être des graines. C’étaient de petites graines, les unes en forme d’étoile, les autres en forme de lune. Il n’y en avait que cette forme. Toutes pareilles aux habitantes du ciel : des étoiles à cinq, six, sept ou huit rayons ; des lunes rondes ou en croissants, toutes avec cette lueur verte des étoiles.” (II,618)

The sky is brought to the earth as through word/image association the tiny seeds capture all the mystery and magic of that great expanse within their husks, becoming little microcosms which encompass an eternally regenerating universe.

The shadow world that is the realm of the possible is beyond time; yet in Giono’s cosmos which is composed of many shifting dimensions, the very solidity of the concrete world can also denote a timeless element. To illustrate this, the author makes extensive use throughout *Que ma joie demeure* of another favourite and very concrete image – that of the tree. Giono’s love of trees is fundamental, and firmly established from his very earliest writing. “Giono c’est l’homme des bois. Sa Provence est celle des forêts, de l’arbre roi : le chêne” says Jacques Chabot, and explains further :

“[Giono] adhère spontanément, sans symbolisme intellectuel, à l’intuition immédiate des anciennes populations celto ligures qui peuplaient la Provence [...] : le chêne *est* l’arbre sacré, le sacré par excellence, car il est à la fois le temps et l’éternité, la durée immémoriale. Et la forêt le premier domicile de l’humanité.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chabot, *La Provence de Giono*, p10

In creating the atmosphere of the Grémone forest in *Que ma joie demeure* it is easy to see that Giono has done just what Chabot has referred to. He has emphasised the sacred mystery of the ancient trees, at the same time establishing their corporeal solidity and durability. The forest is clearly linked to the beginning of recorded time: before men cleared and cultivated the land, it had extended across the entire plateau. Bobi asks Jourdan:

“Quand tu es arrivé il y avait des chênes dans tes champs? Je veux dire de grands chênes, de très grands.[....]

Non. C’était tout propre.

Tu n’as pas trouvé le souvenir d’un arbre ?

Pardon ?

Tu n’as jamais trouvé de racines, de vieilles racines ?

Si.

Où?

Là où je labourais cette nuit. C’était une bosse qui faisait toujours sauter la charrue. [...]

C’était une ancienne mate de chêne. Profonde! Vivante! [...] Vivante, dit-il encore.

Oh! dit l’homme, il ne faut pas t’étonner, les racines c’est éternel.” (II,434/5)

The forest is important not only for its eternal qualities but as a further device to bring the realms of earth and sky into union, thus sustaining the play between the solid and the ethereal elements of the universe. The tree is concrete, defined and immovably rooted in the earth, while holding its branches towards the shifting and undefined expanse of the sky. More than most living things it provides a visual display of nature’s rhythmic cycles throughout the change of seasons. The solidity of its basic structure against the fluidity of its metamorphosing and moving foliage, contains much of the duality which forms Giono’s world: an embodiment of practical reality and the dream. The extensive forest, which plays a central part in *Que ma joie demeure*, holds two elements in balance when autumn first touches it: stability and transformation.

“Un, deux, trios, quatre, puis tous les érables s’allumèrent. Ils se transmettaient la flamme de l’un à l’autre. Les yeuses restaient vertes, les chênes restaient verts, les bouleaux

restaient verts. De larges assemblées d'arbres gardaient leur paix et leur couleur mais, de loin en loin, les érables s'allumaient." (II,610) <sup>1</sup>

The huge steady oaks stand guard, reassuringly unchanging and permanent; while the forest has the added role of providing wood for those in the farmhouses set in the large cleared fields which surround it; a factor which links it intimately with the timeless customs and needs of the human community.

In a description of the ancient craft of weaving, which we will refer to again, and which Giono uses as a focal point to unite the human community, the loom is constructed with materials taken from the forest and for that reason naturally incorporates the elements of tradition and durability. But Giono goes further – this is a standing loom which is formed from the framework of two still-living trees. It is a tool that is entirely suited for its purpose, which is the execution of a craft that also holds elements of mystery (the transformation of a basic commodity into an article of beauty in the fulfilment of a creative vision) and which, on a practical level, has been essential to the well-being of humans since the beginning of civilisation. Giono carefully details every step of the process of the loom's construction as it is established firmly and permanently in the heart of the community. When the men agree to erect it in the farmhouse kitchen for Marthe, they select two small cedar trunks as the uprights. To set these up solidly, they must tear up the floor tiles and dig down to re-plant the roots of the two trees in the soil beneath, then seal the holes with mortar. Bobi smooths the mortar with his hands, marking in it the traces of his fingers, thus inscribing what will become a part of the past: the cooperation of humans with nature is caught in a segment of time, frozen and made visible. To reinforce this point the author informs the reader that Bobi has carved the recent history of the plateau, with great care, onto the lintel of the loom: "Le passé ne pouvait plus disparaître; il était tout inscrit là-dessus." (II,708) The action of sealing the holes with mortar welds into one piece the loom, the house and the earth.

"Ça, says Jourdan, se tiendra tout: la terre, les montants qui sont du bois de la forêt, la maison qui est en pierre de notre terre." (II,707)

But as well as its solid elements the forest carries the flame of the maple trees, a reminder that it is also a place of transformation described as more shadowy and more mysterious than

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<sup>1</sup> On another, human, level one could also see the image as an extended metaphor for Giono's chosen artisans who live among the general populace which remains untouched by the flame of poetry that transforms only those of a particular species (the more "sentient" children of Pan) who are open to its enlightening influence.

all of the surrounding land. This double sense of timeless stability and of timeless mystery makes the forest a magnet for humans at those moments when they desire to be alone and also when they feel the need to seek for something. It is a place of comfort, but also a place where the unusual can happen: another form of “l’au-delà”; one of Giono’s fictional worlds contained within his fictional world and therefore one which allows a place of “safe adventure”. Just entering the forest generates a feeling of expectancy, and it is from there that Bobi emerges on that first evening. When he goes away briefly, it is the place that he chooses for Marthe and Jourdan to meet with him on his return. The phantasmic aspect of the forest is openly revealed when the couple go into the woods for the meeting on a night of warm spring rain and the great expanse of trees appears to be laid out before them in the shape of one huge vaulted building.

“La forêt était tout en charpente, en piliers et en poutrelles [...] on pouvait voir l’échafaudage des arbres, la transparence des branches qui allaient, comme des poutres, de pilier en pilier sans porter de toiture, et entre le feuillage desquelles continuait à trembler le ciel brasillant. (II, 484)

In its nocturnal guise and viewed via the refraction of light through water, the forest is transformed into a magical castle of dreams:

De loin en loin, suivant le flagellement de la pluie qui vernissait des buissons d’aulnes aux bourgeons éclatants puis s’en allait pour les laisser à leurs lueurs, on voyait s’ouvrir des couloirs dans l’édifice de la forêt ; [...] Les lueurs allongeaient des avenues où ne pouvaient passer que des rêves et qui s’enfonçaient sous les arbres ou montaient vers le ciel.” (II,484/5)

The woods in spring present a pure celebration of the vitality of life, a mixture of light, colour, shapes and diverse odours, which although all drawn from the world of everyday reality are combined with such extravagance that the result is a dimension of total fantasy. Marthe and Jourdan have not only entered “l’au-delà”, they are housed in its very heart.

It is at this time of year, as the process of regeneration gets underway universally, that the human heart feels the most intense hope mixed with the most intense frustration. Within the framework of his spring landscapes, the author arranges physical space to make concrete forms of these yearnings which have largely lain dormant throughout the winter. In perhaps the most obvious example of this mental projection, Carle climbs with his son to the top of an old water-wheel:

“Du haut de l’ancienne noria, il avait vu tous les chemins du plateau fortement marqués dans la terre. Jamais, ni lui ni son fils qui étaient montés plus de cent fois sur la butte ne



s'étaient aperçus qu'on pouvait voir tout ça d'ici. Il avait fallu venir jusqu'à ce jour ruisselant de départ et de vent. Cela provenait de ce que la saison nouvelle avait partout poussé la vie de l'herbe et que, au milieu de toute cette verdure, les chemins paraissaient plus vigoureux et plus neufs.[...] On était un peu plus triste en les regardant. En même temps, le sang sonnait sourdement deux ou trois gros coups de tambour dans les oreilles.” (II,688/9)

There are cart roads, footpaths, the bridle road, the high road and the natural roads formed by the constant passage of humans which all have “une puissance formidable”(II,688) as they meet, cross, separate and run away to all points of the compass, with no restrictions and no limits. They are described as being “sans fin et sans fond” (II,688/9), so that they seem to move from the concrete to the ethereal, to become fictional pathways leading to a world of dreams that is formed from the aspirations of the two men.

But there are islands of stability and places of constancy in the middle of all this flux. At the everyday level, where humans must live out their existence, the author contrasts the paths which cross and re-cross the physical framework of the novel and the invitation to freedom which these present, with the security of domestic ritual within the solid, comfortable dwellings of the protagonists. This is a typical Gionian organisation of space into an opposition of the closed and the open. The farmhouses set solidly in their fields, generally provide the stability and comfort of home and of the familiar. However, despite their secure aspect, life on the plateau is hard and the earth surrounding them is initially depicted as unproductive, bare and dreary. By contrast, the mysterious and inviting, which to the human mind means all the riches offered by the limitless worlds beyond the plateau, are suggested through cosmic images. On the night which opens the novel, the sky comes down to touch the earth: “ [pour] racler les plaines, frapper les montagnes et faire sonner les corridors des forêts.” (II,415) Such a dramatic experience, which shakes all complacency and arouses expectation and desire in the human heart, also signals a danger which threatens the comfort and security of the known. The tension within the Gionian hero is very obvious in this early passage where Jourdan looks out over his farm, on that first night when the moon shines with exceptional brightness:

“[...] il voyait le plateau, et le ciel couché sur tout et loin, là-bas loin à travers les arbres, la respiration bleue des vallées profondes, et loin autour il imaginait le monde rouant comme un paon, avec ses mers, ses rivières, ses fleuves et ses montagnes. Et alors, il s'arrêtait dans sa pensée consolante qui était de se dire : santé, calme, « la Jourdane », rien ne fait mal, ni à droite ni à gauche, pas de désir. Il s'arrêtait car il ne pouvait plus se

dire : pas de désir. Et le désir est un feu; et santé, calme, et tout, brûlait dans ce feu, et il ne restait plus que ce feu.” (II,418)

Giono identifies, very clearly, the need for challenge and diversion which has humans reaching out for new experiences, while acknowledging the insecurities and fears that such challenges will immediately awaken. The following passage is equally direct:

“Comme quand on voit partir des gens et qu’on reste, qu’on se dit: « Qui sait ce qui attend? Moi, ma maison est douce. » On s’imagine qu’ils vont coucher dans des buissons d’épines par des nuits de pluie. On pense au bon lit de la maison. On désire à la fois d’un même désir le bon lit et le buisson d’épines dans la pluie.” (II,688)

If the prospect of human annihilation in the face of the universe is no longer posed in terms of a constant physical threat as it was in the PAN cycle, relative domestic comfort, and the security that it provides, raises what is for Giono a far more terrifying prospect: the threat of mental annihilation. In the face of the threat presented by the unknown, the temptation of retreat to the comfort and ease of the known can be even stronger than the desire for adventure. Giono suggests that, ultimately, this can be a deadly choice. Once again, it was *Naissance de l’Odyssée* that introduced the theme, and indeed was on one level built around it, but this is the first novel to deal in a very direct way with the mental state of *ennui*. In *Que ma joie demeure*, Giono, for the first time, establishes the full extent of this contagious despair. It remains unnamed as such, but by an association made within Jourdan’s mind, this feeling of deep dis-ease is given the label “leprosy”. (II,420) The plight of humans is again made explicit. Jourdan establishes it by recalling a visit beyond the plateau several years previously, when in a café he joined friends at table. The men talked contentedly enough, as one does says Giono, until the immediate need for comfort and warmth is satisfied: but then, “voilà les autres désirs qui viennent.”(II,418) Jourdan sees in the eyes of others in the café, a look of care in their very depths:

“Plus que du souci, de la peur. Plus que de la peur, du rien. Un endroit où il n’y a plus ni souci ni peur ; les bœufs quand ils ont le joug.” (II,419)

The disease can be terminal. One of the men will later take his own life and be buried alongside another earlier suicide, a very rich man with everything but an appetite for life, or the way of connecting with the world which enables one to appreciate its pleasures and

allows some joy to the heart. Giono has elsewhere called this desire: “la ration de romanesque sans laquelle on ne peut pas vivre.”<sup>1</sup>

If such a form of leprosy is so infectious, the antidote must be equally contagious in order to be effective. Giono’s recurrent healing formula, embodied as it is in the human healer, has two aspects to it – the heart and the hands:

a) *The heart*: Hope – defined by Giono as: “la force de cœur” (II,28) – is necessary to break through the mental barrier of despair, in order to allow the imagination to perceive the world in a new way that will refresh the spirit. In “Présentation de Pan”, Giono claims to have once met a contortionist from Volx<sup>2</sup>: a man whose antics foreshadow the acrobatic side of the fictitious Bobi. On a day of his earlier life as a peasant farmer, this man had decided out of sheer boredom to put his head between his knees and from that perspective suddenly saw everything as if for the first time. “Alors j’ai vu que c’était beau.” (I,771) In a similar manner, Bobi refreshes his view of things from time to time by standing himself on his hands. His messianic message presents an inversion of the usual values, and in this way, establishes once more that it is the immaterial world that really counts.

Bobi is a man who Giono uses to “réveiller le grand appétit de tous”(II,605), yet his message will only be heard by those with ears to hear. “J’ai jamais su rien désigner [...] C’est curieux, ça. On m’en a toujours fait le reproche.” (II,424) he says on the first evening. His gift is with words, but the gift is wasted on those who insist on staying firmly on their feet. Jourdan, however, understands his metaphors exactly. This is because he has the essential attributes of one of Giono’s more sentient characters: “le cœur pur ...[et] la bonne volonté”. (II,424) In addition to the natural gulf which separates human beings from real communion with the living world, there is another barrier, just as wide, which is formed by human mind-blindness. Giono’s world of dreams is a parallel universe to the one we abide in: a domain where whatever it is possible to imagine, exists.

“Il y a des maçons d’ombres qui ne se soucient pas de bâtir des maisons, mais qui construisent de grands pays mieux que le monde.” (II,429)

It is, he suggests, because they remain unaware of its existence, that most humans limit themselves to this side of the barrier and to a state of dreary hopelessness. The healer who

<sup>1</sup> Giono, from his preface to the correspondence of Machiavelli ; cited by Alan J. Clayton, *Pour une poétique de la parole chez Giono*, p.95

<sup>2</sup> The man leaves his fields to become an acrobat because, he says, it is an antidote to his former life – a consolation “de savoir le ton de sa vie depuis le commencement jusqu’à la fin, de pouvoir dire que, tant que la vie dure, on sera toujours le même, de tourner dans un petit rond comme le mulet sur l’aire.” (I,771)

brings poetry to a prosaic world, will stimulate hope and creativity for all those who are willing and able to hear, so that they can find the words for their own insights and share them in turn.

Bobi's words have had this catalytic effect on the inhabitants of the plateau. When Carl and his son make the discovery of the network of paths in the deep grass, the once inarticulate farmer (Jourdan has said of him previously: "lui, ça n'est pas un parleur" (II,448) ) has the strong desire to share the experience with others:

"Carle et le fils regardaient tout ce monde vagabond emporté vers le sud. C'est en reportant leurs yeux sur les champs qu'ils virent cette chose curieuse, ce que Carle appela :le printemps, quand il en parla aux autres. On ne savait pas au juste ce qu'il voulait dire, ni lui non plus, mais il le disait." (II,688)

And at the end of his having spoken of it :

"Les autres restèrent sans rien dire. Ils voyaient tout ça clair comme s'ils étaient sur la butte de la vieille noria."(II,689)

In the same way, Jacquou the stockman, who dreams of a future full of flocks and herds of healthy, free-roaming animals, cannot refrain from talking constantly of his vision in his enthusiasm: "Il en parlait comme si c'était vrai, comme si ces animaux étaient déjà là. Et ils étaient encore dans le rêve." (II,723)

*b) The hands:* make up the other half of Giono's healing formula, in addition to the heart. As presented in this novel, they are the skilled and caring hands of the traditional artisan. Giono promotes the shadow realm of the immaterial further, through honouring the old spiritual values that one finds entrenched within custom and community. The non-material things, those that lack any obvious solidity in the real world, become those of enduring substance in time and space. The material constructions that humans erect on the planet may be temporary, but the things that relate to the skills passed down through generations need to be valued and sustained. And the value attributed to the skill of an artisan, Giono seems to suggest, is partly composed of the care and commitment that has been invested in the project achieved, as in, for example, the building of a dwelling for a loved one.

"On a l'impression qu'au fond les hommes ne savent pas très exactement ce qu'ils font. Ils bâtissent avec des pierres et ils ne voient pas que chacun de leurs gestes pour poser la pierre dans le mortier est accompagné d'une ombre de geste qui pose une ombre de pierre dans une ombre de mortier. Et c'est la bâtisse d'ombre qui compte."(II,429)

The anti-materialistic didacticism of the author is further reinforced and clearly displayed again in two scenes involving the gathering of the harvest, where Giono returns to the imagery of earth and sky to embody his concepts. The inhabitants of the plateau have made the collective decision to cultivate the lands of their individual farms on a communal basis. With Bobi's encouragement, the community aims at living in a leisurely manner. Producing from the earth only what they need and can enjoy without the goal of any excess for profit, with each contributing according to his or her strengths and talents, allows extra time to enjoy life's simple pleasures. The values displayed in this philosophy are formed in reaction and in direct contrast to those of the outside world. Down below in the commercial fields of the Plain of Roume, the rich owners drive through the ripe fields and Giono figuratively immures them within the millions of wheat stalks that brush past them on each side in walls without break or fissure. The beauty of the world around them is blotted out with what the author calls "un vide nauséeux." (II,740) Giono's imagery depicts men who have lost all purpose to the extent that they are being swallowed up by the very symbol of materialism. They appear to : "pénétrer dans la chair même d'or." (II,740) The owners are in the grip of the contagious disease, greed, which destroys not only the soul but the fabric of social life. When they hire crowds of poor migrant workers, who come in for the harvest, they pay them too little.

But on the plateau where the small community lives in closer proximity to the sky, when Randoulet mows he uses his scythe like a swallow. The simile makes use of the freedom of the expanse of the air while incorporating all the skilful control of the true craftsman – the tool becomes like a bird which: "frotte d'un seul coup son ventre sur l'eau, et revole, et retombe, et revole sans jamais se mouiller le bout de l'aile..." (II,742). As the others gather as one to watch this ancient and beautiful work, Jacquou stoops to pick up one of the cut stalks. Because of the value invested in it by the human mind, the blade of wheat changes from being a symbol of mammon, as it was previously described, to being a thing of beauty and spiritual wealth which has arisen from a non-material world:

"Elle était entière, comme pas touchée, fauchée comme par un faucheur divin. [...] C'était trop beau. Un travail qu'on ne fait plus. « Il faut du temps pour faire ça, se disait-il. Il faut avoir, se disait-il, du temps à perdre pour faucher comme ça » [...] « Ou bien alors, il faut être très pauvre, avoir besoin de tout. Ou bien alors, il faut être très riche et faire ça pour son plaisir, pour sa joie, pour bien faire ce qu'on fait. Voilà que dans ces choses-là, riche ou pauvre c'est pareil, et pauvreté c'est richesse. »" (II,743)

The social interaction which takes place within the community as a result of their cooperative efforts based on traditional values, is a partial fulfilment of Giono's poetic vision of universal harmony achieved through spiritual healing. The author devotes several pages to the other craft that unites the plateau dwellers. When under Bobi's direction the men set up the loom, near-blind old Barbe finds her forgotten skills again, seeing with her fingers as she weaves on Marthe's loom a garment for one member of the community from wool grown and donated by another. The group is united by the beauty and purpose of her work as all the watching humans form one common body.

“Il n’y avait plus le poumon de l’un, le cœur de l’autre, la jambe, la cuisse, l’œil ou la bouche, mais tous les yeux ensemble suivaient la navette, et dans toutes les poitrines au même moment sonnait sourdement le coup de peigne frappant la toile.[...] Tous les regards étaient attachés à la navette [...]. Et la navette les emportait tous ensemble, de droite, de gauche, de droite, de gauche, comme si elle tissait en même temps une toile avec tous ces regards, pour les réunir en une chose solide.” (II, 719)

In this novel, which openly addresses human despair, the social fabric of family, friendship or community united in mutual concern can become all that stands between the individual and the vastness of the universe. The primitive terror of the earlier novels may have given way to the sophistication of *ennui*, but when *ennui* invades the soul the world becomes not only meaningless, but pitiless. While the sky is used as a symbol of the mind's search for spiritual freedom, it is also used to portray the other side of the coin, its capacity for terror in the face of the unknown. Giono suggests in the following passage that there is enough potential love in the collective human heart to counter even the brazen harshness of an unfeeling cosmos:

“On voyait le ciel.

Voilà ce qu’on voyait : [...] le ciel clair, net, pur et, comme on était abrité du soleil, un ciel terrible dont on pouvait voir l’infinie viduité, l’infinie solitude, la cruauté effrayante et sans borne. Et, ce ciel, révérence parler, il se cassait la gueule sur le toit de la ferme ; voilà ce que je veux dire : ce ciel était fait pour s’en aller, tel qu’il était, jusqu’à la fin du temps, de l’espace et de la durée.[...] Mais, de la porte de l’étable on le voyait brusquement finir au ras des tuiles, coupé par le bord de la toiture en dents de scie. A partir de là, ça n’était pas grand-chose, si vous voulez, mais c’étaient la joie et l’amour. Il n’y avait plus de monde insensible. Il y avait des tuiles d’argile cuite, la dentelle de la génoise, la joue fraîche du toit.” (II,464)

The arenas of comfort formed through human relationships, are here defined by the handiwork of humans – the tiles of clay formed and baked by human hands, the lacework of the ridge fashioned by the artisan’s skill – and completed by the anthropomorphic image of the fresh cheek of the roof.

Yet, on the earth, there must always be that accommodation between humans and nature that is necessary to sustain life. Whenever they are expressed by Giono, the things that relate to spiritual values almost always come back to an association on some level with the elements. As we have seen in *Regain*, the simple joys and comfort of domestic custom and community also involve a respectful mastery of the basic elements of water and fire. This is established early in *Que ma joie demeure*. In the opening pages Marthe is aware of the contained strength of those elemental forces within her kitchen, as she goes through the morning ritual of preparing the coffee, while she is also aware that outside the violence of the east wind is announcing the beginning of the dark days of winter in the exposed world.

“Le feu, le chant de l’eau, l’odeur du café étaient une maison beaucoup plus solide que la ferme. On pouvait s’abriter là-dedans beaucoup mieux que dans toutes les constructions de pierre.”(II,428)

The degree to which the elements can be tamed and contained by humans is very small. To venture into unknown aspects of the natural world that lie beyond the security of domesticity, even at the time of the gentle and magical conditions surrounding the first spring, always means to risk the exposure of one’s human vulnerability. When Marthe and Jourdan discover the spring time forest of illusion, Giono makes use of the couple’s experience to establish the full extent of the gulf which separates humans from the rest of the world. There is a suggestion already, at this relatively early stage of the novel, of the hopelessness of a positive outcome to the experiment which has only just begun. While their experience is initially a fascinating one for the couple, reality soon invades their castle of dreams and it becomes bewildering and sad. The breadth and depth of “la grande barrière” is revealed in what seems to be the exclusion of humans from the joyous union of the natural world.

“Ils étaient là tous les deux, lui et Marthe, comme les déshérités et des malheureux. Tout comprenait autour d’eux [...] Tout comprenait et était sensible. Ils étaient seules à être durs et imperméables malgré la bonne volonté.” (II,486)

In the process of pursuing the journey of discovery through the writing of these first novels, Giono has had to acknowledge that human beings are creatures of intellectual complexity, rather than of pure instinct. As early as *Regain*, he conceded that for a human community to succeed there must be some generally approved and supported network of social mores. Of equal importance to freedom and spontaneity, are the simple boundaries which protect. Any indulgence of the more extreme dream of total human integration with the living world must always come back to the reality of the price to pay; which is seclusion from other humans. Bobi/Giono talks of making friends with things not normally regarded as companions for humans: the stars, trees and earth's small creatures. His friendship is extended even to creatures described as: "...si petites qu'elles peuvent se promener pendant des heures sur la pointe de [s]on doigt." (II,525) This is suggestive of many hours of contemplation in isolation, reminiscent of Giono's solitary walks and days of solitary writing. Bobi confesses to the sympathetic ear of the young Aurore that he has in the past been able to make a friend of almost anything, but not of other humans. In the end, when one is used to talking to the rest of the world: "on a une voix un tout petit peu incompréhensible." (II,525) The poet is the most isolated of all humans, if others reject his/her gifts. Which is why Bobi was surprised and delighted that Jourdan understood his metaphor, *Orion-fleur de carotte*, on the very first evening.

If reality denies the possibility of a successful return to a totally natural state, then the dream remains – an opportunity to use the intellect imaginatively in one's manner of regarding the world and to practise a sensitive contemplation of the mysteries of life. From the very first of these early works, it has been the conscious choice of poetic imagery and illusion alone that in the final count will sustain hope in the starkness of the human situation. The author can only attempt to throw a bridge over the great barrier by inventing a creature which moves even beyond an idealised interpretation of the natural world, into the realm of total make believe: an animal so tame that it is: "presque un homme pour qu'on fasse bien le mélange" (II,490). Antoine, the stag, is brought to the plateau to act as a mediator between humans and the world of nature. This forest-dweller carries about his physical presence symbols of cosmic union. Bobi describes him later to the children as: "moitié bête et moitié arbre" (II,488), as against the night skyline the realms of earth and sky are combined within the frame of his branching antlers. He is to serve as a reminder for the plateau dwellers of the things that will bring them peace, having no practical purpose other than to provide a spectacle of beauty and to demonstrate the pleasure to be had from being alive. The gentle creature dances whenever he feels sad and so he becomes happy. His arrival in the first



spring demonstrates the essence of Bobi's simple formula at that time: happiness is all to do with a way of looking, of knowing how to achieve a contentment at being in the world.

In the community on the Grémone plateau Bobi has found people willing to allow the power of his poetry to challenge their indifference and energise their lives. "La poésie est une force de commencement; et une grande force: la dynamite qui soulève et arrache le rocher." (II,606) But dynamite carries its dangers: in destroying man-made boundaries it can unleash natural forces that are difficult to control. In their intense desire for freedom from artificiality, the humans move aside any restrictive elements from their own lives, and also abolish all gates and fences that separate their animals from the natural world, flattering themselves that their feelings of amity and bonding with these creatures will be reciprocated. But the animals gradually move away from human contact. Randoulet's large flock of sheep, that he has had to sacrifice so much to buy, begin to wander. At the beginning the stag willingly remains with the human community, yet during the seasonal resurgence of the natural life force even he loses his human aspect and reverts to life as a simple animal – once he is given some hinds, he opts for the wilderness areas and over time no longer visits the farms. Alan J. Clayton sees all of this as a "séparatisme naturel" which throughout the latter part of *Que ma joie demeure* systematically opposes itself to the "monde humain"<sup>1</sup>. In the end, when released from all constraints, it is only the beasts that are equipped to know how to delight completely in freedom by living according to the world's natural rhythms.

Significantly, the one character who manages to find lasting joy in the living world must totally renounce the ways of humans, even any form of human habitation. The young shepherdess, Zulma, leaves home to live in the countryside, where the large flock of Randoulet's wandering sheep gravitate to her. She is, however, totally set apart from other characters by her simplicity of mind, much as Gagou was. She is a fictional creature of fantasy, a child-like, earth-goddess who strays across the barrier for a time, only to return to her natural domain. Her character is contrasted with the commonsense of Marthe, whom Giono has established as his representative of the well meaning folk of the plateau community: an everyman/woman. When Martha visits the girl, she finds that since having been left to their own devices, the meadows which make up Zulma's territory have quickly grown beyond any of the restrictions and limitations that centuries of cultivation had imposed on them and the countryside has reverted at an accelerated speed towards a complete

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<sup>1</sup> Alan J Clayton, op.cit., p.90

wilderness. Marthe finds this beautiful and exciting, but also disturbing. To her earlier experience within the forest is added a further realisation that as a human being she is restricted to one side of the barrier. She feels, as well, something of the stirring of primitive fear that was common to Giono's earliest humans.

“« Oh ! se dit Marthe, c'est le paradis terrestre ! » C'était triste” (II,672)

It is sad, because Marthe, the realist, knows that she cannot really ever enter this dimension. Her heart is still willing, but her mind cannot transcend the reality of the restrictions of her situation, and as if to verify such thoughts her body finds that it must struggle:

“Elle marcha plus de deux heures derrière les moutons. Elle pensait toujours au paradis terrestre à tous les moments : quand elle trébuchait, quand les herbes se nouaient à sa cheville et elle était obligée de faire effort pour se dégager, quand elle peinait durement pour avancer.” (II,672)

Marthe is as tied to the solidity of the earth as Ulysses was, when he felt himself to be held down by the grasping hands of the earth-goddess. She helplessly watches the freedom of the birds above her in the sky: “patrons de leur terre, patrons de leur grain, patrons de leur liberté” (II 672), in the same way that “le petit garçon” of the story watched the celebration taking place above him.

There is an intermediate zone between heaven and earth, an ambiguous area where Giono's humans are caught and must struggle between the two dimensions. Ulysses learned to escape it through his imagination, as did “le petit garçon”. Marthe, more practical and worldly-wise, can achieve momentary flights of joy but these cannot be sustained without an accompanying fear and a desire for the security of the solid, human things she knows, such as the safety of her kitchen. Marthe comes to the realisation that the joy will never last for humans. It is at one and the same time another admission of human uniqueness and of human insignificance in the universe. Yet, for Giono, the sadness of the human condition never seems to undermine the dignity contained within the concept of man's specificity. It is reflected in the picture of Honoré on his horse at twilight, caught in a zone of unreality between earth and sky:

“Il y avait une éclaircie. Le soleil et un gros quart de ses rayons avaient réussi à forcer la jointure du ciel et de la terre. Un autre quart de rayon crevant les nuages passait sous trois tunnels de nacre et faisait flamber au plus profond de l'orage une mystérieuse

caverne d'or, de soufre et de charbon. Des couleurs étaient suspendues dans l'air à des endroits où il n'y avait rien pour les tenir, sauf la trame légère d'une poussière de pluie.

Honoré sur son gros cheval les traversait, tête baissée ; il en emportait des reflets et, avec ses cuisses rouges, sa tête verte, son bras jaune et son dos noir, il était comme un cavalier de parade.”(II,576)

Seemingly diminutive beneath the huge caverns of the heavens, the human figure can offer only a series of fleeting patterns that are reflected back to their source, the external world which surrounds him. Yet the rider remains dignified; his head may be bowed, but it is with a sad nobility.

The outcome of the experiment in total freedom from all the restrictions of civilisation, in an attempt to live in the spiritual realm of the dream, marks the beginning of the decline of human happiness on the plateau and the reassertion of reality. To live according to the dictates of raw nature is incompatible with any illusion of attaining a state of ongoing serenity. It is the effect of natural physical desire, the result of a reawakening to the urgent pulse of the regenerative life force, that fragments the solidarity of the community as individual needs begin to compete with communal goals. For Bobi, and the two women who love him, sensual appeal challenges love. The choice for Bobi is a continuation of the opposition between the literal and the metaphorical – it lies between an immediate, fleeting, bodily gratification or Giono's idealistic fantasy of the fusion of two souls. Josephine is described in solid, everyday, earthy terms: “Elle était debout, tout droite à côté de lui, avec ses seins de femme, bien gonflés et ses hanches rondes.” (II,514); Aurore figuratively, as an elusive creature of air and dreams: “Elle avait en effet le visage même de la vitesse, avec des chairs lisses et tous les cheveux jetés en arrière et mousseux comme la poussière que soulève le pas puissant des orages.” (II,510) Bobi's physical union with the married Josephine is conducted without shame, as the natural outcome of strong attraction, but destroys the idealism of his spiritual mission. Josephine, with “sa plénitude de femme dorée” (II,519), whom he lies with in the leaves, is another earth goddess who holds his feet to the earth, causing a quenching of his vision. Again, there must be a struggle to break free in order to perpetuate the dream. The brief pleasure that Bobi feels from this union robs him of all peace. “Joie n'est rien et ne vaut pas le peine si elle ne demeure pas. (II,724)

In the contest between reality and the dream reality triumphs as, unaware that Bobi loves her, Aurore destroys herself. Bobi must abandon his vision, along with all the people that he has tried to help. Disillusionment replaces hope, as the messianic and charismatic healer

becomes once more the solitary vagrant, setting out on foot through a vast, surreal landscape known locally as the “wasteland”. His mental pain is erased by an internal numbness, while his physical body, once attuned to experiencing all the joy of the senses, is now exposed to a night so thick, black and boundless that everything external is abolished. “Il n’y avait rien: ni bruit, ni forme, ni odeur.” (II,756) Jean-François Durand says of this passage: “Le monde apparaît dans sa vérité ascétique, littérale.[...] Bobi, dans la perte du métaphorique, affronte le néant du monde, et son propre néant.”<sup>1</sup>

Alone in this vacuum, Bobi retreats within, into the place that exists in all humans, which Giono has called: “ce territoire intérieur où nous allons nous réfugier.”<sup>2</sup> A place where Bobi can no longer visualise or even feel his physical body. The man who wished to exist as one with the plants and animals now becomes pure mind. But there is no escape into the dream, as the present is replaced by confrontational visions of reality from the past. “Il avait une autre perception de lui-même. Il était un faisceau d’images.” (II,762) The battle of the prosaic and the poetic is resurrected within Bobi’s psyche in the form of an internal dialogue. Reality accuses him. His metaphors, it says, are not a dynamic force with which to change lives, but merely a sedative to make life bearable, a soporific for those around him. He counters this charge: “J’ai voulu leur donner des compagnons véritables et la joie véritable.”

And reality replies: [...] “Écoute : la chair est seule. Il n’y a pas de compagnons.” (II,766/7)

In the external world, the union of earth and sky is totally achieved as a thunderstorm of great violence throws up lightening flashes which enable the far reaches of heaven and earth to be seen in a single instant:

“Pour eux il n’y avait plus ni barrière ni rien. Ils sautaient d’un bord à l’autre. Tout le ciel était à eux. Et la terre. Il n’y avait plus de différence entre le ciel et la terre. Il n’y avait plus de ligne de séparation.” (II,775)

From this interconnectedness of the world, the solitary figure on the plateau is still excluded. With the death of the dream, the only remaining way for this human to become whole is by the destruction of the divided psyche through ceasing to be, by losing all specific identity in a physical death. The body can then be released from the mind, able to pass through the great barrier to finally become part of “le grand Tout”. A bolt of lightening between the shoulder

<sup>1</sup> Jean-François Durand, op.cit., p.155

<sup>2</sup> Giono, from notes towards the unfinished *Au Territoire du Piémont*, (II,1240)

blades is the way in which nature claims Bobi at the end, and it takes on the form of a symbol of cosmic unity: “un arbre d’or”. (II,777).

Reality seems to have become the ultimate victor. But the ambiguity of the conclusion to *Que ma joie demeure* is marked. Just before being destroyed, Bobi has had the sudden realisation that his true urge is the strong desire to go on being. Having faced the nothingness of complete despair, he has made a clear choice for the restoration and perpetuation of the creative dream. In fact, however, the fulfilment of this desire for life will be his literal absorption into the natural world. In a projected last chapter which Giono had outlined and mostly discarded, the author depicts in considerable detail the objective reality of this redistribution of human energy into the continuing life cycle. In a scene which recalls the novels of PAN (and also, and in particular, the scenes of carnage in *Le grand troupeau*), and foreshadows segments of *Le hussard sur le toit*, Giono envisages birds gathering to consume the corpse. “Plus les mangeurs de graines de l’aire de Jourdan. [the colourful avatars of poetic imagination] Les mangeurs de viande.”<sup>1</sup> [the stark forms of reality] The foxes arrive, then the flies and the armies of ants. Bobi’s juices are absorbed by the thirsty roots of the herbs and saplings. “Bobi est, à ce moment-là, en plein *science*. [emphasis Giono’s] Il s’élargit aux dimensions de l’univers.”<sup>2</sup>

Despite its graphic content, this projected ending softens the discovery of the meaninglessness of a world stripped of illusion, by affording some universal purpose to the existence of the human species. And in the actual and completed final chapter, which functions as an epilogue, Giono softens the message further by merely suggesting the reality of the engorgement taking place on the southern expanse. He depicts the evening of that same day on the plateau, as Josephine lifts her head to watch a large flock of crows returning northwards.

The profound ambiguity within this final scene restores the status of the creative illusion. Josephine has never felt so at peace. She draws strength from everything around her, all the noises, sounds and colours of nature’s energy on a pleasant evening. “Il lui semblait que Bobi avait maintenant cent façons d’être avec elle.” (II,780) Her restlessness has departed. Josephine is content with herself and the world, while she waits for the return of Bobi. He

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<sup>1</sup> “Appendice III” to *Que ma Joie Demeure*, II, p.1357/8

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

has taught her hope and her dreams will sustain her. In the epilogue, Giono achieves a final unity between the prosaic and the poetic by intertwining the two. In this way, he accords to reality its rightful place, but still upholds the dream.

**Conclusion:** Through multiple images found throughout *Que ma joie demeure*, especially those that are evocative of earth and sky, Giono depicts the struggle within the human heart between what is longed for and what exists, by contrasting the solid, fundamental elements and the metaphysical mysteries of the cosmos. Within these shifting dimensions, controlled by the energy of the universal life force, images that are used to show the realm of possibility and dreams for humankind can also reflect the terror of the unknown; those of comfort and community, the crushing boredom of the mundane. With the advent of the poet/healer as spiritual leader and would-be messiah, the author indulges himself in one final attempt to achieve a form of integrality in the human psyche by bringing enlightenment, via the restorative power of words, to those receptive enough to develop an ability to perceive the secrets of universal oneness that the natural world conceals. But a direct confrontation with reality seems to reveal that the poet's word pictures do not bring enlightenment, only deception. Natural forces continue to dominate human motives and desires, but at the same time to exclude humankind from any real participation in their dimension.

*Que ma joie demeure* completes the circle outlined within *Naissance de l'Odyssée*. The external world of mundane reality is easily deconstructed by the imagination of the poet, but the recreated, compensatory universe that replaces actuality is always vulnerable and open to destruction by those forces which would deny it an existence, because of the fragility of the human mind that conceives it.

Giono's characters of the future will abandon the unrealistic dream of spiritual fulfilment through humankind's actual integration into the natural world. Instead, fully aware of what they are about, they will exhibit incredible feats of will power in the face of adversity and the challenges of reality, through an insistence on developing the strength and skills which increase the durability and potency of their unique imaginative worlds.

## General Conclusion

*Le mensonge: « cet arc-en-ciel jeté par le poète que tout le monde voit, qui n'existe pas et qui illumine les prés plus lourdement que le soleil. »<sup>1</sup>*

For Giono, existing in the years of the 1920's and 30's in an increasingly automated and commercial world which he sees as essentially "anti-poetic" because it deprives humans of natural beauty and simple purpose, the poet/author has an essential role to play in restoring the spiritual balance to humankind. While he makes us often aware that the subjectivity of the human gaze contributes to the solitary aspect of humans, and hence to their essential loneliness, throughout the novels of his "first manner" Giono has continued to suggest that as long as the mind remains open (and this openness is the essential ingredient) to the influence of some positive creative catalyst (such as the word of the poet), perceptiveness can increase and perspectives become enlarged. Individuality then becomes a positive factor, allowing for the original insights which lead to innovation. This in turn can enrich life, not only for the individuals concerned, but also for their societies. The seeker after truth can enlighten the way for others as dreams proliferate. Imaginative connectedness will lift an entire community above the everyday toil which is "le sort commun" spoken of in *Naissance de l'Odyssée* (I,8), just as in that same novel the fantasies of Ulysses released the whole land from dull reality.

A general dissatisfaction with the world as it is, fuels the human drive toward exploration and imaginative creation. The exterior world of Giono's early novels is structured by a projection of the conflict to be found within the human heart. In the struggle between what is longed for and what exists, the creative force manifests in the desire of the author, through his various doubles, to fully experience the world in which humankind finds that it must live and to transform it with his images.

Giono began this process, in *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, with the invention of his own myth; his portrait of the artist which would always be a work in progress, and in the PAN trilogy commenced creating the illusion of the author as the traditional *conteur*, assuming several identities to relate the stuff of myths by exploring the most ancient of humanity's concerns – meaningful existence in the face of a formidable universe. Here, Giono replaces the heroes

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<sup>1</sup> From an unpublished text of Giono, cited in *Bulletin* n° 29, p.11

of the mythic tradition with ordinary peasants from his native Provence, the gods with the powerful forces of nature and the epic adventures with deceptively simple tales of human reaction to the immediate environment. In these novels, the word-imagery of the storyteller constructs an ever-changing world, moulded by powerful cosmic forces and interpreted by the as yet embryonic imagination of humans who have a close association with the countryside and a necessary degree of interdependence with the natural forces around them, but who retain a constant and distancing awareness of the threat of possible annihilation at any random moment.

Giono's characters progressively evolve in psychological complexity from that point and by the time of the composition of *Que ma joie demeure*, in 1935, have moved further to the foreground in his novels so that the subjective world that they perceive, and must interact with, has become more intimate and uniquely personal. This individualisation brings about a change in emphasis – the primitive influences lose much of their terror and shift, to become the domain of Pan's superior in the pantheon of gods, Dionysus. The human mind is no longer the receptacle of raw experience which engenders the basic emotions of fear, contentment, pain or pleasure strongly modified by superstition. The emotional response of individuals to the natural world now extends far beyond that of the sympathetic characters of the other earliest novels. Yet the basic human desire remains much the same as it has from the beginning: to savour the very essence of the sensation of living by grasping the fleeting moment fully.

Over the early works<sup>1</sup> those characters acting as the author's doubles, and/or his mouthpiece, have gradually developed an imaginative capacity which enables the human mind to consciously extend a chosen moment by capturing it in the symbols (words) through which one can explore, compare and hold onto any emotion or insight engendered, and then replay it in the mind at will. In order for humans to fully explore the depths of a sensation, it is essential to first define it in words. It is necessary to translate an experience into symbolic form in order to "know" it in a way that is useful to us. Translating its essence into the creative images that can be conveyed through words and purveyed to those with a hunger for dreams, is the vocation of the author/poet. Capturing the moment not only allows it to be emotionally explored and consciously "understood" by the participant who is capable of harnessing the power of words to achieve the task, but it also enables the impact of the

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<sup>1</sup> Except for *Naissance*, where the development occurs within the novel itself.



experience to be shared with others. One must re-see, before one can help others to see. The poet, then, eventually becomes a figure of unity between humans and the land, a channel through which the “song of the world” can reach the ears of others. He/she enables a perception of the hidden magic and drama of the living world, overlooked in the common drudgery of life, and awakens the remnant memories of a mythicised past.

In the most primitive of Giono’s first novels, Pan must stand in for the as yet unrealised poet as the symbol of unity. Pan is not for Giono (apart from the odd illusion) the usual goat-footed god, but the power, both benevolent and malevolent, that manifests in the living force of nature mixed with the responsive emotional force found within man – both these forces have the capacity to build and to destroy worlds. Good and evil does not exist in a clear form in the early Gionian universe. Instead, we have seen how the concept of *panique* embraces the double aspect of creation/creator and destruction/destroyer in the following ways:

*Creation:* takes the face of *le grand Tout*, the great eternal cycle of life. Giono’s detailed and lyrical descriptions promote an intense appreciation of the existence of all things (even the inanimate), of their right to exist, of the importance of individual joy and suffering through the uniqueness and worth of each entity. At the same time, creation strives for universal equilibrium, where all entities will interconnect to contribute to the energy of the cosmos. Yet, paradoxically, there is a deep and persistent division among humans which Giono constantly underlines. As the novels develop we see that creation has chosen ambassadors. These sentient beings, or creators (set apart from other humans, who either deny or are ignorant of the power of the redemptive word), are driven by a fascination for mystery and possess the demiurgic power to change the world that appears to exist to human eyes, in order to attempt to reveal to others the universal, eternal aspects of life that lie below the surface. These artists/artisans of Giono’s early novels retain some aspect of Pan in their manner or appearance, signalling some degree of childlike primitivism and a relationship with the natural world which is to a greater or lesser extent symbiotic.

*Destruction:* comes through the powers of nature which possess the latent ability to assume supernatural proportions, and to annihilate humans and their handiwork, displaying a terrifying indifference towards humanity’s position. Destruction has its counterpart in the human destroyers, capable of bringing pollution to the natural world, destroying the social fabric of communities or the lives of individuals, through the practice of ignorance, insensitivity or greed.

Among the agents of destruction, in Giono's eyes, are the social engineers of his era. Part of his desire to reconstruct the world stems from a strong personal dissatisfaction with a rapid increase in the de-ruralisation and industrialisation of the land. In the early years of his profession, the author holds the belief that through the power of his imagery he can change lives. This, he believes, is the poet's a social duty – to aid others in their quest for happiness. It is as a part of this promotion of a dionysian, sensorial perception of the world, that the poet is presented as healer and saviour, working through a form of gentle subversion. The anarchic attitudes Giono inherited from his father are not based on a hatred of those who have, but on compassion for those who have not, and are born from a strong desire to see universal freedom from poverty and oppression. His rejection of the known and accepted societal values of the twentieth century is an attempt to change the heart of man; a stand against materialism, industrialisation and militarism. Above all, he sees modern civilisation as destructive of tradition and the environment and the consequential loss of a general appreciation of the majesty of the natural world around humanity as a widespread societal malaise.

On the general human level, an awareness of the creative/destructive power of the universe which surrounds them, commonly intensifies the state of mental tension for Giono's characters. Throughout the early novels we have seen their constant inner struggle between basic self-preservation and the drive towards exploration as an enduring conflict between the management of life's practical and psychological demands for comfort and security, which raises the danger of a descent into stifling tedium and material greed, and the demand for adventure and fulfilment with all its attendant fears and perils. This conflict is often symbolised by Giono's use of space; by the contrast between areas of constriction necessary for protection and the vast physical tracts which comprise *le large*.

The major construct then, in these early novels, is a tension within the reality/dream opposition, with humanity caught in the middle. Giono's attempt to remove this conflict by the creation of a state of homeostasis within the human mind, achieved through the power of the poetic word, means that accompanying a process of the breaking down of old concepts is the construction of new ones, as contradictory forces become complementary and all oppositions are resolved in a synthesis of life.

To achieve this end, the habitual dualisms of the everyday world of “actuality” are dissolved through a constant process of deconstruction. The term deconstruction is used here in the sense of identifying, in order to destroy, the binary oppositions that present themselves to the general consciousness. These oppositions are traditionally hierarchical – that is, one term will be prioritised while the other is treated as derivative or subordinate. Giono uses them in a way which demonstrates the instability or reversibility of their usual positions. But then, with a type of “second degree subversion” which he seems to employ to prevent any risk of assumption, he will sometimes uphold them and make full use of their inherent, accepted symbolism.

Most often, Giono makes use of the formula of the poetic metaphor to bring about his process of deconstruction. The alchemic process takes place within the human mind, where the poet’s imagery ignites the imagination of the listener (or reader) to deform and recreate the perceived world. It brings the infinitely small and the infinitely large together, showing how the worlds that are found in miniature are wondrously expansive, and how the expanse, which can be terrifying, can be tamed by enclosure within a microcosm. It creates “rooms”, or hermetically-sealed zones outdoors, which offer comfort and security, while pushing back the limits in confined areas, making them as vast as the imagination and breaching all boundaries. It abolishes distance by bringing the heavens down to earth, interchanges obscurity with clarity and makes the abstract concrete while dissolving solidity. It abolishes time while establishing the durability of the eternal. The author forces a new way of perceiving the world, accentuating the sensations which are overlooked or taken for granted. He presents the blind as those who see, and the sighted as those who are blinded by their own preconceptions. He uses anthropomorphic imagery, not to degrade humans, but to afford a similar status to animals and he imparts life even to inanimate objects. In this way he dissolves the value system which he sees as complacently assuming the superiority of humans.

But the concept of universal cohesion is not always sustained. Within the broad reality/dream construct, certain oppositions remain constant. There are some definitions that Giono holds to firmly – those that he has himself proposed – and the use of these constants must bring a check to the fundamental unity of his vision. In the early novels that we have explored, the following symbolic oppositions appear to remain inflexible:

*The organisation of space into levels.* The high, low opposition, at its simplest, represents the prosaic and the poetic. For example the lowland space in *Le Chant du monde*, which denotes

reality, is opposed to the fictitious space of the mysterious highland area of the Rebeillard. The high mountainous area of Lure is from the start of Giono's fiction the earliest avatar of mystery and desire and there is a corresponding strong dislike for subterranean, or dank, dark areas. Giono extends this concept and uses it on many occasions to symbolically oppose the base with the pure. Giono's conception of these two values may differ from commonly held views – that which is base for him is the mundane or vulgar, the loveless and the artificial; the pure denotes generosity of spirit, and the natural state of things – but within his own terms of reference the opposition stands firm, and resists any deconstruction. It will continue into the second manner of writing, where it will find its most literal expression with Angelo, the hussar who lives on the roofs of Manosque above the ravages of disease in the alleys beneath. The few occasions where it is reversed serve to reinforce the concept of a world turned topsy-turvy. Paradoxically - and there is often a paradox with Giono - the view from above is favoured because of Giono's fondness for the panoramic with its opportunity for simultaneity and ubiquity, which help to give the illusion of a *mélange*.

*The town, country opposition.* A further, associated, constant opposition found in Giono's early novels is a strong dislike of the urban setting and a promotion of rural life. He will laud the sensorial richness offered by the countryside and deride the barrenness of the town in almost spiritual terms. The most positive asset of rural existence is that it offers humans a life of closeness to the land. There are instances of greed and ignorance among Giono's peasants, but there is often redemption through an opening of the spirit to the healer/artist. The suggestion seems to be that the people of the country are more able to be healed because of their connection with the natural rhythms of life. The prevailing generosity of the country (which is also true for the community of poor in the town, differentiated from the rest of the comfortable urbanites), is displayed through the overall willingness of the peasant folk to engage in collective enterprise. Giono's early and intense dislike of the bourgeoisie as a class, therefore, denotes a distaste for a way of life which is comfortable with mediocrity and willing to embrace all the artifice of modernity, rather than a dislike for individuals. It is formed not by envy of their position, but from a dislike of what he sees as their general acquisitiveness and poverty of spirit.

These are firmly held positions on what are, for Giono, moral issues. They are not broken down or deconstructed, but strongly reinforced by his metaphoric images. In the final analysis, they are an acknowledgement of the specificity of humans ( which encompasses a challenge to the dream) because it is through the ability to make choices, moral and otherwise, that they are separated from the rest of the natural world.

Broadly speaking, these oppositions organise themselves again into the expansion/contraction dichotomy which fills the human mind and is responsible for its existential plight. As we have seen, the author can imaginatively blend and interchange these two realms, absorbing the macrocosm in the microcosm and dissolving boundaries at will. But, as if to underline the very necessity for the dream, he at times allows it to come up short in the face of reality. There are crucial moments when humans must confront the void within and without – moments when Giono forces his characters (and himself) to acknowledge the starkness of a world without illusions, when he places them up against a universe that has been stripped of its imagery and disenchanted<sup>1</sup>. On such occasions Giono can take the very territory which is usually the domain of the dream itself, and turn it into a nightmare, as when he makes use of the desert-like qualities of the high plateaus of Provence. We can recall some of these moments: the fear generated in the lonely travellers in *Regain* by the glimpse of another vertical figure (Mamèche), on the seemingly endless, windswept expanse; the battle through the rain and mist in the apocalyptic landscape of *Le Chant du monde*, or the moment of truth for Bobi in the surreal, southern stretch of the Grémone plateau. All are occasions when in the face of the emptiness of the world outside, the human characters must confront their essential solitude and the void inside.

In the face of fear and emptiness it is hope that sustains by giving rise to new dreams and by throwing up new challenges to reality. In the prewar novels hope is carried by the poetic word and endures through all, indulging and even promoting immoderation, up until Bobi's cathartic admission of failure. This moment, which identifies an underlying truth, is like a portent of things to come in the life of Giono: the failure of the real life experiment of the Contadour (sited on another plateau), the outbreak of the Second World War and the personal trauma and disillusionment which will follow.

Ultimately, these factors are but a confirmation of the one basic truth of Giono's universe, in life and in fiction, which has been Bobi's discovery in *Que ma joie demeure*: the essential solitude of humans, even in community. A recognition, not only of the specificity of the human race, but also of the subjectivity of human interpretation. Despite Giono's longing for a world of complete cohesion, in the final analysis the subjective viewpoint of the human

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<sup>1</sup> Once again, Ulysses was the first of Giono's characters to experience this treatment; when he wandered, lost, in the parched, wild mountain terrain.

mind – which is the power which creates the Gionian universe – is the very proof of human uniqueness. “Reality”, appears to be the inevitable misunderstanding and miscommunication that occurs between humans and the living world and between human beings themselves. The “dream” continues to be the only solace; but from now on with a shift in emphasis. No longer the desire for cosmic union, it will become the eventual, studied retreat of the hero into the *territoire intérieur*; sometimes – as it will be with Herman and Adelina and Pauline and Angelo – with one special other, so that the couple develops a unique form of communication as a result of their mutual sensitivity to poetic imagery. Oral communication (in the form of the poetic word) then becomes a type of figurative code, which translates to the subtle complexities of style found in the novels of the second manner, and which underlines the relationship between writer and reader. The union of Panturle and Arsule in *Regain*, and the marriage of Antonio and Clara with one another and with the earth at the conclusion of *Le Chant du monde*, was not to be the beginning of a new community to produce a people like those of the mythical Baumugnes. These couples are now seen as the forerunners of those individuals and pairs of Giono’s future novels, who will learn to use the dream as an art form, to give life meaning and manageability.

In *Que ma joie demeure*, Bobi’s last action, and his last words, are already a form of direct challenge to the world of objective reality.

“ Ne cours plus! » cria Bobi.

Et il s’arrêta de courir.

« Non, dit-il, maintenant je sais. J’ai toujours été un enfant ; mais c’est moi qui ai raison ” (II,777)

This challenge announces a coming new reality. Having come to face to face with the nothingness outside and within, and stripped of all illusions, the author’s doubles are now free to build a world which confidently and openly parades and celebrates its own illusions. Bobi’s demise points the way to the new brand of heroes that begin to emerge in the novels of the works of transition, and who live in worlds that will become more and more radically subjective, and which they will recognise as such. While, through irony, Giono’s future writing will often hold reality up to a close and detached examination, at the same time it will present a deliberate evasion of the banality of life through a celebration of the creative and the fictive.

*Il y a dans l'habitude du rêve une création continue aussi matérielle et valable pour le bonheur que celle qui sort des calculs de l'ingénieur. [...] On n'a jamais vécu sans rêves. Le pont lui-même[...] a été rêvé au bord de la rivière avant d'être construit en pierres et en acier. Pour le bonheur, il n'y a pas de certitude dans l'acier ; elle est dans le rêve. (Postface à Angelo ; IV,1181)*





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